

THE EVANGELICAL MISSION TO TRAIN OVERSEAS CHRISTIAN STUDENT
LEADERS IN THE BOSTON AREA

A THESIS-PROJECT
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF
GORDON-CONWELL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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JANUARY 2023

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PREFACE

How was the vision for this thesis-project formed?

In 2012, the status of Chinese Christian returnees was reported, and God showed the author that there was a group of people who were chosen by God, and they have been trained in campus Bible study groups in North American Chinese churches. These senior Chinese Christians came to the United States to study during the 1960s to the 1980s and are now retired, which means that many have been released from their workloads and church responsibilities. These Chinese Christians are ready to act as resources for overseas Chinese Christians who plan to go back to China.

In 2013, Rev. Edwin Su, the chair of the board of Oversea Chinese Campus Ministry (OCM), visited Beijing from Los Angeles and met the author. Through detailed discussions, both agreed on the visible resources in North America.

In 2015, Rev. Su collected testimonies of early North American Chinese Bible study groups on campuses and published a thick book. This author attended a conference of about a hundred of these seniors, which was held in Los Angeles and organized by the OCM.

In 2017, the Ambassador for Christ (AFC) organization agreed to the suggestions from Rev. Su, Rev. C. K. Chuang, Rev. Dr. David Chow (the AFC president), the executive director, Dr. Yeou-Cheng Bor, and others to hold a similar meeting in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Most North America Chinese Christian organizations participated, and the discussions were focused on preparation of the returnees. The author participated in this meeting.

In 2017, Returnee Mission Fellowship (RMF) was formed as a department of OCM. RMF held a meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, with about eighty-five people attending, one of those

people being this author. Many situations and needs, as well as the ways to prepare the returnees, were discussed.

In 2018, the author, along with about one hundred returnees, attended a nationwide returnees' conference in rural Beijing. The group used one of the safe places for Christian meetings; during the four and half days, the returnees, many of them from different cities and provinces, shared their experiences. As a result, the author gained a deeper understanding through the discussions.

In 2019, the author attended the China Mission Conference (CMC) held by AFC, at Christmas time. There were twenty-nine hundred attendees gathered in the Baltimore, Maryland, International Conference Plaza. The AFC holds the conference every year, and the location rotates from the East Coast, the West Coast, and the South, so every three years the event happens on one coast. In December 2020 the conference used a virtual meeting style and fifty-six hundred people attended; the author regularly discussed returnees' missions with several AFC board members.

Through the years the author has discussed these ideas and plans with more than forty seniors, many of them elders in North American Chinese churches. Most of them fully agreed with the ideas. A way to motivate people is a challenge, but with the calling of the Lord Jesus they will be raised up to serve him again effectively.

The current huge number of Chinese overseas students will be the major social structure of China in the next fifteen to forty-five years. The number of Chinese overseas students is prodigious, and the Chinese Christian returnees are well worth the investment required to teach them.

ABBREVIATIONS

AFC	Ambassador for Christ
AMP	Amplified Bible
CCP	China Communist Party
CCS	Chinese Christian seniors
CMC	China Mission Conference
ESV	English Standard Version
FYP	Five-Year Plan
GDP	gross domestic product
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
IC	integrated circulate (chips)
IPO	initial public offering
IPR	intellectual property rights
KJV	King James Version
LFCR	lost faith Christian returnees
MDiv	Master of Divinity (degree)
MOE	Ministry of Education
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NEB	New English Bible
NIV	New International Version
OCM	Oversea Chinese Campus Ministry
OCCS	overseas Chinese Christian students

PhD	Doctor of Philosophy (degree)
PMI	Performance Measure Indication
PHILLIPS	Phillips Modern English Version
PRC	People's Republic of China
R&D	research and development
RMF	Returnee Mission Fellowship
RSV	Revised Standard Version
SOB	state-owned business
SOI	state-owned industry
SRCC	senior retired Chinese Christians
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

ABSTRACT

Salvation is for everyone, and Mainland China has a population of 1.4 billion, of whom fewer than 1 percent are Christians. From 2001 to 2014, the author observed different environments on-site in China. Among Chinese overseas students (about 389,000 per year are in the US), 5 to 9 percent convert to Christianity, but the retention rate is very low. This research asks, Why is the retention rate is so low? and Can retention be increased through a “Train the Trainer” program designed to help senior Chinese Christians act as mentors to young Chinese Christians?

CHAPTER 1

THE VISION FOR THIS THESIS-PROJECT

Description of the Problem and Setting

Many Chinese had converted to Christianity while taking advanced courses for several years in foreign countries, after which they returned to China.¹ However, on their return to China, some of them found it difficult to find a place to worship. By end of 2018 the total number of returnees to China was calculated as 3,651,400 people. In 2018 alone, more than half million people returned to China. Among them, between 5 percent and 8 percent converted to Christianity while they studied overseas; therefore, 20,500 to 50,000 returnees are converted Christians. However, it was reported that from 80 percent to 85 percent of the converted Christian returnees did not continue to go to churches when they went back to China.²

In response, the events described in the preface form the vision for this thesis-project, which is to train trainers to strengthen young returnees to China. The foundation for this training is Jesus' way of discipleship. A metaphor for the process is that of a kite flown from a distance: no matter how high a kite flies, the trainer (mentor or spiritual parent) will always be connected to the mentee (the young Chinese who return to Mainland China).

To understand the need for training trainers, one must first understand there are external and internal factors for why the problem exists. The external factors and challenges include China's different political structure, religious restrictions on returning Christians, a different

1. Han Zhang, "Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home," Foreign Policy, January 26, 2017, accessed August 16, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/26/chinese-converted-out-west-are-losing-faith-back-home-christian-churches-study-abroad>.

2. Xinhua, edited by Huaxia, "China's Education Internal from 2016 to 2020," December 12, 2020, accessed December 23, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/English/2020-12/23/c_139611486.htm.

economic system, new technology development, and a dissimilar social and cultural structure.

The internal factors are different expectations about personal value and status, strong social and market competition, adapting to dissimilar church styles, new family expectations, and many combined internal and external factors, which are mixed.

To find the root causes of this problem, one will better understand if one exchanges one's position, as if he or she was born in Mainland China and understands the different structures and mindsets of China's specific characteristics and current environments.

External Factors and Challenges

China's Different Political Structure

Mainland China is officially run by the Chinese Communist Party government and now calls itself "the Socialism Market Economics with Chinese Characteristics." To this author, it is a combination and transformation of capitalism, socialism, and communism mixed with part of Chinese cultural traditions.

China is a country in which authority is centralized. It was transformed from a military system, so even today the management style and functions are noticeably more like that of a commander to his military troops. Not only does all ownership of land belongs to the country, but also most of the utilities and heavy industries are run by the centralized government (e.g., power supply, water supply, fuels, natural gas, the related crude oil industry, steel and all metals), as well as all the education systems, the transportation systems (e.g., highway, railway, subway), telecom systems, medical systems, postal systems, banking systems, and media systems. All these systems can be called state-owned industries (SOI) or state-owned business (SOB); the foreign initial public offering (IPO) was listed by a good portion of each huge SOI or

SOB. The companies and competition were introduced but under government regulations (e.g., all telecom operator heads are assigned by the government). Competition was used to prevent problems of laziness by a monopoly and requirements from the World Trade Organization (WTO). These formations are what the author means by describing China as a country run as a combination of capitalism, socialism, and communism mixed with some Chinese traditional culture.

The human resources or so-called personal management includes monitoring; each person has a personal file in Mainland China which records everyone's activities, including all information about a person, starting from birth and elementary school. When one moves to a new place, one would need to report and submit one's personal file, which is sealed and passed on to the new organization; even if one works in a joint venture of a foreign company, the file would be gathered in a separate place. The new place would keep and update the file, and one's personal information requires full transparency to the government. One's computer, phone calls, messages, media posts and so on would all be monitored. When one applies for credit, for example, one's phone number, computer account and bank account, credit card, one must register with one's full, real, official name, and photo identification is required.

Chinese Communist Party members number around 90 million, 6 percent of China's population, which was around 1.38 billion in 2019, and almost all management positions and significant roles of any kind (e.g., the president, the cabinet, governors, municipal officers, country village leaders), as well as almost all government-owned companies, are held by party members. It is not easy for a person to apply for party membership. One must learn what to say and how to say it about any matter concerning about the country, and what not to say.

Christian returnees are challenged by the degree of freedom compared with what they were used to while studying or working in foreign countries. When they return to China and face those centralized authority systems, it is a challenge to adapt to the system and how long it will take to get used to the system. The system may have changed after several years being out of country.

Religious Restrictions on Christian Returnees

One of the most important basic principles of the Chinese Communist Party is atheism. Nonetheless, China's constitution is different regarding religion.

Numbers of Chinese Christian were increasing quickly even during the Cultural Revolution (underground churches thrived between 1966 and 1976). This increase made the government well aware that the numbers of Christians were rising; as a result, out of fear the government has controlled and managed Christians. Many regulations of religion show that the restrictions from the Chinese political party were formed by their imagination that Christians could be gathered as a powerful force that would become a gigantic, hidden danger against or a challenge to the government (e.g., the Tian-An-Men event in 1989 formed a huge crowd that was a colossal threat to the government).

According to the author's observations (from 2001 to 2014 in Beijing, on site) the numerical growth and development of Christians were very rapid. For example, in 2002, when the author visited the Motorola office in Beijing, he joined their Bible study during lunch hour; when the group grew, they moved to the home of a member's family which was near the office. After three or four years the Bible study groups became four new city churches (each has more than one hundred members), and most of the attendees were returnees who had finished

advanced studies in foreign countries, especially in the United States. In Beijing, there were many joint-venture foreign industry companies, and many foreign experts from various fields moved to work in Beijing. There were Christians from outside who shared at the Bible studies. This movement was another miracle done by God, and the new city churches did not register with the government. From 2017, Chinese authorities have labeled them illegal gatherings.

The new city churches also started to support the rural house churches in many provinces by giving them computers, as well as many other financial supports, because Chinese rural areas were still in extremely destitute situations. According to many studies, the house churches were growing rapidly.

In 1949, when the Chinese Communists coerced foreign missionaries to leave China, the number of Chinese Christians was counted as near three million, and in 2017–2018 estimates showed the number to be more than ninety million, although the population increased three times (450 million to 1,380 million). The number of Christians increased thirty times, which was another miracle done by God.

In Mainland China, as of 2019, most of the house churches and new city churches (not registered) have been forced to close. Pastors and main workers (elders, deacons, cell group leaders) were charged with illegal conduct, and some were sentenced to jail. New, strong restrictions on spreading the gospel and on gatherings do not allow Sunday schools for children, and people age under eighteen are not permitted to attend church meetings. All religious activities and gatherings are forbidden. In three-self churches (registered by the government), the pastor must receive and pass training courses before a preaching license is issued, and the content of sermons must be reviewed and must follow the new instructions of the religious bureau's regulations. Monitoring cameras are installed inside and outside of the churches.

If one is a professor at a university or any grade of teacher, if one works in a hospital as a medical doctor or in any state-owned organization, one will be asked to sign an oath indicating that one does not believe in any religion. Therefore, fresh blood needs to be injected for the future development of China evangelical missions.

Returnees would feel very different while in churches in foreign countries, and they do not feel welcomed at churches in China, as it will take time to gain trust as newcomers from other areas. Church leadership styles are disparate, and some are also quite centralized; the senior pastor possesses authority. Some issues with returnees are the discrepancies of how churches function and how friendships are built. Many local pastors in China do not easily accept the opinions of these highly educated young returnees, which can create obstacles to merging into the new churches' system.

A Different Economic System

The Mainland Chinese government started in 1949. In its first thirty years, from 1949 to 1978, China tried hard to practice “communism theory” and “materialism theory”; however, Mainland China paid the consequential and immense price for its demonstration of the theories. As a result, China became a very closed region, and it was poverty-stricken. During this period, it emphasized that there was no personal property or banking account. Everything belonged to the country (including one's life), everyone dressed in the same clothes with the same color, everyone received the same amount of food tickets, which had the same coupons for cloth, and so on. In the “People's Commune,” the single family was restructured. One would not need to cook for family, because many people would eat together, as they would in a camp or a military

troop. Children would gather; women and men were separated in different working groups; and this communism ideology was called Planned Economics.

When it came to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), China started to reopen. At that time, especially from 1976 to 1978, a huge wave of people slipped to Hong Kong, and the new leader, Deng Xiaoping, stood by the border of China and said, “This is not a problem of the people, but a problem of the government.” Ever since then, China started to open and build a free-trade zone and industrial park is near the border of Hong Kong. China also began to allow people to share in the harvest they worked on, and this encouraged people to wake up very early in the morning to work on the assigned farms. It is said it is human nature to work for oneself; in communism, which ignores that human nature is self-identity and ownership, incentive and motivation would be very low, even zero. The collectivization of agriculture—the disastrous policy of communist Russia around 1930 and Mainland China in the 1950s—ended in tremendous suffering.

Another influence of communism is that it introduced idea of “the class struggle,” a result of which is that no one would be able to trust anyone else. People were encouraged to monitor the people around them and report to the people who were in charge. People were asked to confess any wrong idea in their minds and confess any wrong activity they did. Later, this system induced the management of economic activities that could be based only on the real benefits and true gains of any economic exchange and trading. One must learn how to protect oneself from not being cheated or from wrongdoing.

China was run by its Five-Year Plan (FYP), and the fourteenth FYP (2021–2025) will follow the big changes of the 2020 global new environments and challenges.

With the goal of FYP, in 2019 around eight hundred million people were lifted out of poverty (\$2 per day), and the GDP of China surpassed that of many advanced countries. In 2014 China became the second-largest economy in the world. Nevertheless, China is still falling behind in its technological and social structure; besides, scandals in China have been extremely serious. The world's financial crisis has slowed the speed of China's growth in 1997, 2003, 2008, and 2019, but returnees were welcome to work in China, and the competitions were serious.

In 2001, when China entered the WTO, it introduced all kinds of regulation of capitalist ideas, and China also referenced many countries' practices of socialism (e.g., Norway, Finland, etc.). China also needed to fulfill regulations required by the WTO, and it planned and promised to practice for fifteen years before fully adopting the regulations. But in 2016 China found the adjustment time was not enough for this transformation. How China would position its economic standing point is a big challenge. Returnees would need to face the different economic systems and find a Christian way to live in this society.

New Technology Development

In 1978, when China started opening, soon Deng Xiaoping visited Singapore, Japan, the United States, and many other countries. He encouraged higher-ranking management officers to visit and observe the advanced countries, and they found that China was far behind the new technologies in most fields. In the next forty years (1979–2018) many industrial parks were organized, and different industries from foreign countries were attracted to build and set up production in China. China's labor force produced great successes, which caused big changes to

society and economics. By 2019 supermarkets in the United States were filled with all kinds of products made in China.

China's policies in the early stage were that every foreign company would be required to set up a joint venture with one Chinese company (now China allows for wholly owned foreign entities). Then these joint Chinese companies would be responsible for supporting how the venture would operate: for example, the land which would be needed for the factories (ownership of all land belongs to the government), and all construction, such as water supply, power supply, telecom infrastructure, new highways, and roads for container transportation. Some industrial parks even built standard warehouse and factory facilities. All the necessary conditions would be in place and would be available for manufacturing needs. The new joint Chinese company team would be welcomed to participate in the management team; therefore, human resources, the financial department, marketing, and planning would all be organized by both sides, and most of the Chinese partner members initially would be positioned at lower levels. Technologies would be also shared by the joint partners. Returnees were welcomed to work in these joint venture companies due to their technical and linguistic advantages.

The Chinese market is gargantuan, and the number of potential customers from Japan, Europe, and the United States would be attractive to advanced countries; besides, the relatively cheap cost of labor with acceptable quality was in China; at the beginning of China's opening, labor was very affordable when compared with other regions. The slogans were that "China will use its market to exchange the technology": to draw, pull, or introduce the new technology; to adopt or absorb the new technology; and to develop indigenous capability or modify to produce newer technology. Learning from others is a good way for indigenous or self-development. But it will create an image of copycats. It is normal to learn from others, but without a proper

management of intellectual property rights (IPR) China would easily receive complaints and global penalties.

Starting from 2008, there were more than seven thousand research experts from foreign countries conducting shared research projects with Chinese research and development (R&D) organizations or universities. Still, the gaps have been enormous and indigenous efforts have been needed. By 2018, the trade war between the United States and China showed that China is still very behind in the high technology of, among other things, computer chips, airplane jet engines, and integrated circulate (IC) chips. The trade war suddenly awoke many Chinese people to notice that China has a heavy shortage of agriculture technology and products. The food demand of 1.4 billion people is a big challenge; in case worldwide bad weather causes serious shortages, then there would be no possibility to buy food, and this would be a disaster for China.

Returnees are expected to generate outstanding contributions to new fields and new technology, and this fact causes great stress and pressure, for comparatively few people (10 million returnees out of 1.4 billion, the population of China) would receive the chance for advanced education in foreign countries. Most of their family members, friends, or neighbors were great supports and thus expect performance and achievement.

Dissimilar Social and Cultural Structures

In the early stages of Chinese Communist society, especially during the Cultural Revolution, terms were used to separate people in two groups: “the red five groups,” membership in which was identified by three generations (if one’s grandfather and father were peasants, factory workers, military personnel or soldiers, or the proletariat), and “the black five groups,” which meant the three previous generations were landlords, rich peasants,

counterrevolutionaries, rightists, or others who were considered bad elements. Those in “the black five groups” were considered much less worthy than “the red five groups”; during the Cultural Revolution, even a wrong book found in one’s house meant the whole family would be put into punishment groups.

Only members of the red five groups would be able to apply for Communist Party membership, which meant one would have much better opportunity to gain a better position for work and education, with a much brighter future. But the black five groups would receive punishment, only because, for example, one’s grandfather was a landlord.

If one of your relatives lived in a foreign country or region and still had connections, you would be acutely monitored, because the government thought that you might leak secrets to the outsiders; even the red group would need to build good relationships with any government department. It would be a blessing if opportunities would be opened for you; therefore, people were eagerly building their social relationships, because authorities held most of power of permission in their hands.

This is an invisible pressure for everyone, even today. It is important to stand in the right group, and the different groups of people may never get along well, for no one wants to be labeled as part of wrong groups. Returnees face these kinds of pressure when they work in this different social structure and culture.

The culture is such that people cannot trust each other, but they need to share benefits and opportunities, and when one is trying to win friendship with higher-level officers, bribery scandals often occur. In any group, the higher-level officers often require new members to be involved in their scandals, or they may even force all the team members to fall into the same scandal situations. Any leaked messages could cause all to be damaged. And the most important

rule is that one must be very careful about one says in a public environment. For example, in an office meeting, it is not proper to say something against government announcements or the weakness of a policy of the country. Even if a person is asked to give some evaluation or policy suggestions, the management team probably wants to test the person's real point of view.

Christian returnees need to demonstrate the Christian life from one's love of God and neighbors. It is important to hold one's breath, that is, not to judge, blame, or criticize others. Instead, Christians need to focus on love for God and neighbors, and to share one's faith in privacy, in one-on-one testimony. A reborn life is like a lamp which shines by itself, and one's good deeds attract and draw people to the Christian and to Jesus eventually.

Internal Factors and Challenges

Different Expectations of Personal Value and Status

The first question that every Chinese Christian returnee will face when going back to China (either from himself or from friends and family), normally will be, "Why did you not stay in a foreign country?" Behind the question is a negative idea about the returnee: he or she is not able to find a job in foreign country or is not good enough to survive in the foreign country. When this happens, how will returnees answer the question and face old classmates, previous teachers, or the relatives? And how will returnees talk to themselves?

In a foreign country, such as the United States, every year new job offers, and new working opportunities provided or generated by advanced foreign countries remain almost at a similar number. However, the numbers of new Chinese graduates (master's degrees or doctorates) are increasing rapidly. The new graduates may stay one or two years more in foreign countries and find a job, but it will become more and more difficult for companies, which will

accurately calculate the cost and earnings. Many companies are not able to offer an official work position, or to say it will help the foreigner to apply for a green card or a residence permit. By contrast, in China the high-tech companies are looking for new experts who already possess experience in the new technologies.

In addition, the expectations of one's achievement or status, the title on one's business card, one's position in a company, one's achievements, and people's praise could generate an atmosphere that would form huge pressure and stress. Many Christian returnees find that they need strength and energy to survive for basic needs, since many of their parents are not Christians. A returnee might wonder, what is your Christian value? What is your meaning in life? It will be easy to find a sound, standard answer, but a mature Christian's growth needs time and guidance; for many Chinese Christian returnees, not only do their parents and family not know Christ, but also many family members seriously oppose the returnee's Christian faith and belief.

There are no support resources from previous church members who are far away in foreign countries, and it would be disgraceful to mention any of this when talking to friends who expect all is well. Returnees would be concerned about how people look at them; the value system in a new Christian's heart could fall short without a mentor's support on site. The Lord Jesus Christ always stayed and lived together with his disciples daily, and the apostle Paul always maintained close relationships with Timothy and the churches. It is important for Christians to have supportive mentors to build close relationships and establish Christian leaders' faith gradually, even at a distance.

Strong Social and Market Competition

Chinese parents wish to be very proud of their children, and those who can study overseas for their advanced education are of high value for parents. This attitude perhaps is caused by the fact that China was closed for many years, and when China opened again all the people deeply admired the progress of foreign countries. The returnees' relatives and neighbors would be proud of them and hold high expectations.

Before 2000, most of the people who had chances to study outside of China would necessarily need to receive scholarship awards, and many of them were top students in China. Almost no families could afford the tuition and lodging costs for studying abroad, and many parents needed to borrow money for the first air tickets and expected their children would repay the debt someday.

By 2019, job opportunities in China for returnees have been very competitive. By the end of 2018, the number of returnees was calculated to be 3,651,400 (from 1980 to 2018). In 2018 alone, more than half a million returnees went back to China. The number of college graduates in China was more than 8.34 million in the summer of 2019. They were all outstanding students and young, according to China's *People's Daily*. This fact means returnees face increased competition for work. But different fields of study are paid differently; majors in engineering, economics, and science in China would get higher salaries and have the top employment rates. The highest-paid positions are the sectors of information technology, finance, real estate, and operations; Chinese tech graduates do particularly well (e.g., biochemistry). A person's field of expertise is now becoming one important factor in the competition.

In China, one's social relationships are important. Without a strong family background, one needs to develop one's social networks, and for these reasons' scandals occur. Officers in

higher positions expect gifts in exchange for opportunities. First it is required that one performs well in one's field, but also people need to demonstrate they can get along well with the team, that bosses are satisfied both with work well done and sound relationships with others.

Many Christian returnees are under strong pressure, for a sound job is not easy to get; after the world economic crisis in 2008, a good number of Chinese left foreign countries, mainly the United States. In addition, it is not easy to find another Christian in China to marry, for those married couples were most likely to have younger children. If a Christian returnee wishes for a better salary or a higher position, he or she will face challenges and pressure.

Adapting to Different Church Styles

After 1949, all missionaries left China, and during the Cultural Revolution, churches were closed, Bibles were burned, and pastors were put into jails, but the underground churches were still sharing the gospel. People memorized the Bible and copied by hand several books of the Bible to share. In 1978, China opened after Deng visited the United States, and English teachers and professionals from foreign countries were welcomed. Also, many missionaries then re-entered China with titles other than that of missionary. On the campuses of Chinese colleges, they were spreading the Christian faith and were very successful. The number of young Christians increased rapidly.

The missionaries (e.g., English teachers) were from different denominations. Later the new churches' formats were different, and although teaching should be based only on the Bible, different points of view and Bible interpretations were found. At the same period the number of Korean missionaries also increased rapidly, and different styles could be observed. In 2017, new Chinese religion regulations were announced. The new city churches and house churches are

required to be officially registered by the government and under supervision; otherwise, the churches would be dismissed and considered illegal gatherings. The sermons and programs of the three-self churches would be monitored and supervised; the pastors would be asked to pass required interviews before the issue of preaching licenses. Before 2020 the churches in China had been divided into small cells, but now the church is an online virtual gathering.

Church management style is different, as many are more centralized (e.g., the senior pastor is a typical leader, and he is the center of a church). Churches compete with one another on the number of congregations; the size of church buildings, including the cross on the top of the sanctuary; the wealth of a church; and the number of people who are baptized in a year. Many deemphasize evangelical mission but focus on the internal affairs within the churches.

One of the most serious challenges for Christian returnees is that the Chinese government would ask returnees to take an oath that they have no any religious belief (that is, abandon one's faith in Christ), if their companies are related to the government: teachers and professors in universities, education organizations, any industry or business that is related to government, research organizations, and medical organizations, including hospitals with all workers and medical doctors. Because China is a very centralized country, it has less opportunity for people to work in a private company, and even if a company is a private company, there must be a Communist Party-organized group, and they monitor all the people who return from foreign countries.

Christian returnees would need great faith to prepare to be as wise as serpents to face earthly persecutions for the faith. That is tremendously difficult, and only those who are equipped and fully prepared will be able to deal with it. With good spiritual parents one may remain in the faith and stand firm. It is extremely hard for outsiders to understand the pressure

that Christian returnees deal with. If a returnee is not mature enough, he or she will easily fall. Only God would release the pressure from inside, and Christians from outside need to remember the brothers and sisters and pray earnestly for them.

Christian returnees are short of nutritious spiritual food to grow so that they will love to share their faith with others. But many returnees feel exhausted. They will need support from mature spiritual parents who will encourage them to grow continuously in faith.

New Family Expectations

Since 1981, China has had a policy that only one child was allowed for each couple. Starting on January 1, 2016, all Chinese couples can have two children. This marks the end of China's one-child policy, which for thirty-five years has caused most Chinese families to have only one child. Christian returnees mostly come from one-child families.

There were advantages and disadvantages for this generation. The disadvantage is that there is no other brother or sister in a nuclear family, so the child would be lonely and isolated when growing up. This is especially true in rural areas, for parents both might start to work in city factories to make money for a better life (e.g., to build a better house), but their child would be left in the countryside to grow up with their grandparents. It is often found that children love to talk to themselves; they have less opportunity to learn how to build relationships with others and can easily become self-centered, with decreased communication skills. They have fewer friends to talk with and possess lower social capabilities. However, the advantages were that the parents would pay more attention to this only child, gender is much less important (as in Chinese tradition, people would prefer to have a male child for the purpose of inheritance), and resources

would be greater than in previous generations. Public education is more available for every child, and the teachers would be able to pay more attention to each student.

As a result, the parents and family have high expectations of this only child. In Chinese tradition, the child has the obligation to take care of elderly parents and grandparents. Since the father and mother were also under the one-child policy, their only child would be expected to support and take care of four grandparents and parents—altogether, six older members of the family would need to be taken care of later.

In China's official regulations, if an older person is begging on the street, the younger family members would be charged by the police, and a penalty ticket would be given. (This is why people seldom meet a beggar on the street, for the social security system is different.) It is against the law to ignore this, and it is the responsibility of young family members to take care of older family members. One's social value and reputation would be atrocious, and friends would look down upon someone who did not care for elderly family members; however, if people make it a priority to take care of parents and family members, society will praise them. This also shows how people are immensely reluctant to move to nursing homes, because it can indicate a child does not have a good heart to take care of the elderly. It would cause a consequential problem because family responsibility is a high-evaluation checkpoint in Chinese society.

Expensive kindergartens and costly dual-language education (in middle and high schools) are very difficult to enter. The number of students and resources are unequal, and that imbalance has caused extreme stress for returnees as parents to fight for their children. One of the goals for Christian returnees as parents would be to support their children with maximized opportunity and plenty of resources.

The Elements of the Thesis-Project

Research Question and Thesis Statement

How can senior Chinese Christians living in North America be trained as effective, long-distance mentors for expatriate converts when they return to China? This thesis-project is based on the Great Commandment (Matt 22:37-40) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). The overall goals are following the commandment and commission for a lifetime.

Hypothesis: How to Fix the Problem

Addressing the problem requires that one consider five factors.

First is the status of churches in Mainland China. In 2020, most house churches and new city churches were forced to close, with strong restrictions on spreading the gospel. In Three Self-Churches, pastors must receive and pass training courses before they are issued a preaching license, and the sermon content must follow the government's new rules. Fresh manpower must be injected into the future development of Chinese evangelical missions.

A second consideration is to train the trainers. Jesus and his disciples lived together, worked together, and ate together. Jesus taught by doing and the disciples learned by observing, which indicates a long-term mentor-mentee relationship. The growth of a young Christian leader will take time, and a family relationship will be built.

A third factor is the candidates. Seniors who are fifty-five or older, overseas Chinese Christians, with higher education (a master's degree or beyond) are the desired mentor candidates. They will have studied and lived in the United States for more than twenty years and have been a baptized Christian for at least ten years. They will possess a heart as tutor or mentor for the building of future Chinese Christian leaders. Mentor candidates must have good

reputations in their education and jobs, as well as good records of service in Christ in the churches, being willing to serve the Lord. Potential young Christian leaders must be reborn Christians who love God, show leadership or other talents, and love people.

Another consideration is campus and web platform systems. Many Chinese churches in the United States have youth group fellowships and make opportunities to contact and meet students through church-designed activities (e.g., Bible study, eating tables, church retreat activities), building friendship and trust while they are on campuses. Then, long-term relationship can be expected.

A final factor is travel restrictions and fewer visas. In 2020 to 2021, travel restrictions were issued in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, Chinese F-1 visas dropped by 99 percent. The United States granted 88 percent fewer student visas to applicants worldwide. In January 2020, a travel ban was issued on students entering the United States from China. According to data from the China Ministry of Education, the number of returned students from abroad continued to rise in 2019, reaching 58,000.

The Two Groups of People in the Research Project

There are two groups of people in this study. One group is made up of senior overseas Chinese Christians, who are located mainly in western advanced countries. They came from Asian regions to those countries to pursue advanced education mostly between the 1950s and the 1980s. They started many campus Bible study groups in many universities and later built many Chinese Bible churches in western countries. (Today there are around fifteen hundred Chinese churches in North America alone.) When these people came to the West, there were very few Chinese pastors available to serve. Consequently, the members of the Bible study groups had to

share the work of sermons, Bible studies, Sunday schools, youth ministries, prayer meetings, and church management, and that included preparing lunches for everyone after Sunday services, among other tasks. They had hands-on experience and were fully equipped by having to meet the needs of these situations. Today this group of people is located by and large in North America, and now they are retired.

The second group of people is Chinese overseas students from Mainland China who came to do their advanced studies mainly from 1990 to 2019. A small number of these people came earlier, between 1980 and 1990 (China was opening in 1978), but this group increased rapidly after 2001, and after the APEC meeting in Beijing in 2008, a big jump in the number occurred.

One of the similarities of these two groups of people is that many of them were converted to Christianity while they were doing their advanced studies in foreign countries. In the seniors' group, many accepted the Lord Jesus while they were in the Bible study groups or in evangelical retreat meetings during summer or winter vacation periods.

The second group of Chinese overseas students who converted as new believers also increased rapidly (from 1990 to 2000). After 2001 the number of new students increased very quickly, and those younger generations are very different from the previous generations. They are more independent and financially self-sufficient, because with more Chinese students on a campus, they organize their own activities, and very few of them need part-time jobs to support their daily life. They are the generations born after 1978, when the Cultural Revolution in China ended. They have grown up in booming economic times, but the mission is the same: people still need love, peace, and joy in their heart.

These young overseas Chinese Christians will be the main structure of Chinese society in the next fifteen to forty-five years, and one may reasonably presume that God has sent them to foreign countries to observe the world outside of China. However, 80 percent of these converted Christian returnees are not continuing to go to church, for which there are external and internal reasons. Yet these potential future Christian leaders are worth an investment in time and teaching, and those candidates will also be training future leaders according to their special talents.

According to the author's discussions with several pastors or elders in conferences, in North America alone there are more than fifteen hundred Chinese churches (2019), and from 65 to 95 percent of these congregations were formed by people who came from Mainland China. This is a great milestone and a remarkable miracle of God. Another reality is that the numbers of Chinese overseas students are enormous, and North American Chinese churches or Chinese Christian organizations are not yet forming an effective way to handle evangelical outreach to these huge numbers. Many North American Chinese churches lack manpower and strength, as well as compassion, to give time to support consultation. Besides, outreach is not in a high priority for the churches, for the churches are already very busy, with tight schedules.

One possible strategy is to train young Christian leaders to spread the gospel among the students, and when they go back to China, they will stand firm and act as good servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. After they go back to China, they will receive support from long-distance spiritual parents.

The “Train the Trainers” Project Design

For the “Train the Trainers” project, the trainer candidates are overseas Chinese Christian seniors who are well-educated, with professional work experience, familiar with Bible truth, and speak Chinese. Above all, they are spiritually mature, full of life experience, and have time available because they are retired.

Nonetheless, most of them did not grow up in Mainland China, which means they have very limited understanding of the changes in China since 1949. Therefore, it will be necessary to provide enough information about China for them. One attempt of this author is to provide a set of courses to fulfill the gaps, along with motivating the seniors to get out of their comfort zone. How will they act as mentors (spiritual parents) with the love of Christ? It will heavily depend on God’s calling, and the mentor’s role is a long-term relationship with the mentee, following the pattern of “to train the trainers” (2 Tim 2:2).

By contrast, when the returnees go back to China, they are unfamiliar with the churches’ situation and styles. Owing to rapid changes in China, they will need to prepare themselves in different ways which will help them to fit in quickly, but the North American Chinese churches are not fully aware of some changes. For example, in Beijing there are new city churches and house churches, which all were forced to close in 2019. Only the three-self churches can function under stringent government regulations. A current observation (2019) is that many new city churches and house churches could only divide into small cell gatherings. The good news is that evidence has shown that evangelical mission has not stopped but has only transformed into different ways. The mission is the same: to spread the gospel.

This thesis-project has adopted the pattern of Jesus and his disciples, as well as Paul and Timothy. The disciples study and learn from their mentor.

Vision

The growth of a mature Christian needs time, and it is important to have a mentor to guide one for a long time to make sure that growth is stable and to prevent hurt. Therefore, the idea of “flying a kite from a distance” is formed. When someone is flying a kite, the wire is in one’s hand, and the kite will operate against the wind. The kite can freely fly high and far in the sky because the supportive connection is always there. It can be a metaphor of Christians living by the holding, supporting hand of God. For returnees, it is likely they will fly against winds when they return to China; the returnees are not only easily isolated by their surroundings, including parents who are unbelievers, new friends, and even old friends. Also, the job competition, new requirements, and new regulations can easily drag a young Christian down, and he or she has no one to talk to or receive help and support.

The loss of Christian returnees who are not fully equipped before going back to China, mainly due to a short period of time to grow while they study in foreign countries, is ever a possibility. Most of the overseas Chinese churches are not aware of their needs, the challenge they will face, and the difficulties ahead. The churches do not have follow-up plans and action. After returning to China, it seems to be a kind of forsaking—the returnees are to face the new challenges by themselves.

Mission

The mission for this thesis-project is to build up the returnees as faithful, independent Christian leaders and to establish long-term relationships with their mentors in the United States. The lessons learned from previous times are that young Christian returnees were not ready and equipped enough when they went back to China to face the challenging environments of work,

family, and social culture. During their journey of growth, the spiritual parents (mentors) will support and accompany them to overcome the difficulties.

Objective

As a trial project, ten mentors will be assigned to and practice with ten potential young Chinese Christian leaders (a matching meeting and a six-visit program). A series of training courses for the seniors will be conducted to see whether the results are practical. After training, evaluation and modification will be done; from Boston to the Northeast, to the entire United States, and then worldwide, the overall expectation is to train four thousand potential young Chinese Christian leaders in ten years. There may be more than twenty thousand qualified Christian mentors in North America, but it will need God's calling to move them out of their comfort zone. Current Chinese restrictions on Christians to share the gospel are a motivation for this "Train the Trainers" project.

Strategy

The strategy is to build connections and to motivate mature senior Chinese Christians to be spiritual parents. This relationship is like flying a kite from a distance, as the returnees will be in China somewhere. Or it can be compared with an airplane pilot. After significant training, the new pilot will be able to fly independently. The spiritual parents act as family members, for long-term relationships can be built and trust gained.

A Christian leader's growth will take at least several years according to a planned, intensive program of about ten thousand hours. Young leaders will be able to reach maturity—that is, they will be reborn Christians who develop their gifts and leadership skills. A sound

Christian lifestyle can be observed, and as a pattern, both mentors and young leaders will follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples, and the apostle Paul with Timothy and the churches.

The mature Christians are fifty-five and older, highly educated (this fact will attract students), have sound working careers, and will have served the churches intensively in the past. Their experiences have been built for at least twenty to thirty years.

Methodology

A first version of a questionnaire did not receive an adequate response. This questionnaire was sent by email, and the expectation was that it would be returned by email. However, the senior Christians needed to have preliminary promotion and information before they responded to the survey.

For the first survey in this thesis-project, the order of questions needs to be adjusted, with the more difficult questions being merged in the middle. The questionnaire should find out about demands and needs; it also needs to define the qualification of mentors, website platform building, and development of mentor training courses. Three churches are willing to distribute the questionnaire and receive the responses. The questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Overview of the Thesis-Project

The vision of Chinese overseas returnees was formed in 2012. The author interviewed many Chinese pastors, church elders, board members of Christian organizations, and returnees, and attended returnees' conferences in both in Beijing and Atlanta, Georgia. The Lord's leading is obvious. A twelve-interview file will be an appendix to the thesis-project.

In chapter 2, the author explores the biblical/theological framework, focusing on the overall mission of a Christian, the second coming of the Lord, the judgment and reward of a Christian, and reflects on the Great Commandment and the Great Commission.

Chapter 3 is a review of relevant literature, focusing on mentoring, discipleship, and leadership, including tools to enhance personal character and the returnee's phenomes.

In chapter 4 the author sets forth the project design, which consists of four parts. First, the author did about thirty interviews, half with pastors and half with Chinese overseas Christians, including ten returnees. Second, I found seniors need to understand the current China before they can mentor more effectively. Therefore, six courses will be prepared for them to take online; then a review will be done to determine if the training was effective. Third, ten mentors and ten to fifteen mentees will be assigned. Through seven steps of matching processes in two months, the mentorship will be built. Evaluation of these processes will be done for this research project. Fourth, the results will be analyzed to determine the feasibility of future trials. The manuals of operations will be modified.

CHAPTER 2

A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

The biblical and theological framework of this thesis-project is formed by the theology of discipleship, and it is based on the Greatest Commandment (Mark 12:28-34; Matt 22:35-40) and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20). Discipleship theology is formed by Jesus himself; how and what Jesus did to train his disciples is the best model. Discipleship examples in the Bible will also be included in the framework. One example is the apostle Paul's idea to "train the trainer" (2 Tim 2:2-4). The objective of this research is to build disciples of overseas Chinese Christian students and returnees to they may work with God to bring about the kingdom of the Lord.

The conclusion of salvation is written about in Revelation 22:12-13 (HCSB and AMP): "Look! (Behold) I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me (I shall bring My wages and rewards with Me) to repay (and render) each person according to what he has done (and his own merit) [Isa 40:10; Jer.17:10]. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End (the before all and at the End of all) [Isa. 44:6; 48:12]."¹

The overall mission for all Christians today is to follow the Word of Jesus and focus on Matthew 24:14 (HCSB and AMP): "This good news of the Kingdom (the Gospel) will be

1. Most Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) plus the Amplified Bible (AMP), the words from which are in parentheses and underlined. Other Bible versions referenced are the King James Version (KJV), New American Standard (NASB), New International Version (NIV), Revised Standard Version (RSV), Phillips Modern English Version (PHILLIPS), New English Bible (NEB), and English Standard Version (ESV). The Chinese Version is a translation of Spirit of the Reformation Study Bible. The NIV is used for more information about the Greek and Hebrew Bible, expressed more directly by notes. References in brackets have been added by this author.

proclaimed (preached) in all the inhabited earth (throughout the whole world) as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.”

In brief, the core of the biblical and theological framework of this thesis-project is that Jesus will be coming back; the promises of a new kingdom will be fulfilled; the heavenly Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God in one; the eternal God has all authority in heaven and on earth; the objective and obligation for Christians are to take actions to make disciples and to share the gospel with all nations; God will work with Christians until the end of the world; and in his second coming he will judge all the works done by each Christian. As the growth of a mature Christian (disciple) is a process and this growth needs time, a mentor can guide the stable growth of a mentee.

The Overseas Campus Ministry (OCM) in the Chinese Returnee Christian Conference (2017, in Atlanta) reported that returnees easily lost their faith and no longer attended church in China. The causes are many, as were detailed in the sections External Challenges and Internal Challenges in chapter 1. Those challenges can easily discourage young returnee Christians, and those Christians have no one to contact. In recent years the church system in China has changed and persecution is enormous. Who could these returnee Christians talk to for help and support?

How the Biblical and Theological Framework Is Illustrated in the Thesis-Project

The theological and biblical framework connects with the elements of this thesis-project as enumerated in chapter 1 and here:

Vision: the second coming of Jesus, the new kingdom in heaven, and the judgment of Christians and the world

Mission: to preach the gospel to all nations, and then the end will come

Objective: The Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations

Strategy: to rely and depend on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Tactics: The Greatest Commandment is to love God and neighbors

Vision

The vision that is described for Christians in the Scriptures could be a long and wide picture and accompanied with a time frame. One could imagine it as a movie with many layers of content, and some content will be understood later. The vision is created from God's creation of the universe and will end with the forever new kingdom (Rev 22:12-13, HCSB and AMP). A Christian should know the things related to his or her life while in this world. Vision will determine the direction and values that will form the purpose of life, the value system of life, and the meaning of life. The final judgment will tell what will be evaluated, what will be the rewards, and hence what kind of behaviors will be expected by the heavenly Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Wise people will consider the teaching of Scripture; their actions and behaviors will prepare people to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, face to face with God.

The Second Coming of Jesus and the New Kingdom in Heaven

The promises of God are listed in Matthew 16:27 (AMP) and Revelation 22:4-7 (AMP). God's plan and his creation purposes will be fulfilled; the Bible has presented his overall plan from the beginning and to the end. The plan in general should be able to be understood, although not in every detail. It includes Jesus' second coming, his judgment, the fulfillment of his kingdom, and the new heaven and earth. All these things are true and will be done. This is his love, and a Christian will receive it by faith in earnest expectation. The plan is an ongoing

process, in which some events have happened and have been proven. For example, the prophetic Scriptures have been fulfilled by Jesus' birth, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, there is evidence for the future promises which are yet to happen and are clearly described.

The most amazing promise is that Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for Christians (John 14:1-6, NIV). The promise of heaven gives direction to life, and the meaning as well as purpose of life can be defined. The vision will give direction, and the clear destination would be fulfilled by faith and hope, for God's love and promises will never fail.

Christians have already received the promise of eternal life and a place to live in eternity, and Christians are building on the foundation of Christ Jesus every day on earth. The outcomes of their faith and works will be tested by fire: those works which will remain would last. Not everyone is equal in heaven; their place will depend on what people have sown in their lifetime and will receive the harvest as a result.

The Judgment of Christians and the World

The judgment is according to everything Christians performed (2 Cor 5:10, AMP). Many times, the Scriptures refer to a farmer who worked for a long time and longed for a good harvest that would bring the whole family joy and sufficient supplies for the entire year. Therefore, people would be conscientious about planting seeds, deciding the right place, preparing the soil, watering, and taking care that harm would not come to the crops. Both outside and inside work is to be taken care of. A farmer would need time to accumulate experiences (that is, to mature) and to be taught by old farmers. A farmer can learn not only through knowledges but also through sufficient practice to adopt fully the methods of doing things in the right ways. Many may

develop new ways of doing things, but without good a foundation the work will never be counted. People would call them blessed if they could learn from good mentors.

Scripture teaches about judgment in detail.

Who is the judge?

To begin, Jesus Christ is the authorized judge (John 5:22; 2 Tim 4:8, NIV). The Father honors the Son, and so a Christian would also do so. The judge is righteous, so the righteous nature is within Christians and all people on earth. When God created human beings, he put a spirit in them, and humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Although people were created in the image of God, to have righteous minds and hearts, because of the Fall they cannot follow what is right. Greed, selfishness, jealousy, anger, and many worldly desires occupy their minds, and they decide to find excuses to do what is wrong. People know what is wrong, but they have it done anyway. This is how much people need the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Who will be judged?

Everyone will be judged (Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 3:2-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Eccles 12:14, NIV). Judgment is according to God's orders and standards. People will be judged by what they had done, and they will receive the harvest by their efforts during their lifetime. Therefore, there are no excuses, no complaints, no blame of others; each person will be responsible for what had been done. People normally will remember all things which have happened and have been done by them. There must be a huge database in heaven in which is recorded all motivations and the true reasons of all things that have been performed. Each person will receive individual judgment.

When will the judgment happen?

The judgment will occur at the second coming, when Jesus comes back for his church (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:14-18, NIV). No one knows the exact time of his second coming. Jesus said only the Father knows—even the Son does not know. And when the time is near there will be false news about his second coming. The true signs of Jesus' second coming are described in the Scriptures, but many people will not understand until it happens. Now, people will understand what has happened according to the Scripture, and it is like gradually opening the scrolls. But the most important fact is that it will surely come very soon. A wise person will not take chances and try to hide but will faithfully obey God's way to live on earth: to love God, to love our neighbors, and to take responsibility to share the gospel to all nations.

Why will people be judged?

People will be judged because all have sinned (Rom 3:23-24, AMP; Rom 3:10, AMP; Isa 43:27-28, AMP), and the price of sin is death. All have sinned, because human beings possess a sinful nature, which is affected by the devil, the king of the world. Jesus was tempted by the devil but won that trial. Nonetheless, the love of God sent his Son to pay for the price of the Fall. Jesus proved that there was no sinfulness in him. Jesus offered himself as a sin offering and died for all human beings.

People must be without sin to be with the pure heavenly Father and to be a part of the new kingdom. The sins of people have been paid by Jesus' death on the cross. How great the blessing is! But this good news Christians need to proclaim to all the nations and make disciples.

What things will be judged?

Christians will be judged for multiple things, one of those being faithfulness (Matt 25:21-23; 1 Cori 4:2-5, NIV). All Christians hope someday the Lord will call them good and faithful servants. (“Faithful” means trustworthy, reliable, consistent, having integrity, not telling lies, having no hidden sins and wrong desires. “Good” means having fine results and reputation, doing good deeds.) With this announcement, people will be rewarded not only the title but also many blessings and can be a guest of the Lord at the same table. Today, a rich businessman would have to pay a high price to have a lunch with Warren Buffett, but what an honor it will be to have a chance to share a table with the Almighty! He is the Creator of the universe, and all authority, kingdoms, and power belong to him.

Christians must also be obedient to God’s commandments and leading (Luke 12:48; Heb 5:9; 1 John 5:2-3; John 5:24; 14:21, 23; Rom 8:1, NIV). Obedience is one of the most important characteristics in a military system. All soldiers follow the orders and commands of their officers. Obedience is always related to what one should do and what one is forbidden to do; there are no excuses for not following the commands. Reward or punishment will be the outcome of evaluation. From the beginning human beings failed to follow the command of God and tried to blame others as well as find excuses, and the punishment was severe. The love of God sent Jesus to be a sin offering and to save those people who believe and receive salvation. This all was caused by human disobedience. Those who obey and produce good results will receive more responsibilities.

People will also be judged for the words they speak (Matt 12:6-37, ESV). Everything a person has in his or her heart will be on the lips. Even words which are not spoken but are in the

mind and heart will not be able to be hidden. God will judge the heart and soul of each person at the final judgment.

Our attitudes will be judged, too (Matt 5:22, ESV). A person's attitude could be shown by facial expressions or actions. The words selected, the tone, and the speed of the words all start from the heart and reflect one's internal attitudes. To guard a person's heart is the key to having correct attitudes, and good attitudes encourage a person and lift one from difficulty.

Hidden sins will be judged (Mark 4:22; Rom 2:16, ESV). A wrong desire or a wrong motivation can lead to wrong behaviors. People know there will be judgment if something goes wrong. People always wish to win praise from others and to boast about themselves, but God Almighty knows everything in the universe. There will be no place to hide. People's hearts know right from wrong, and people always try to hide what is wrong, because judgment is real. There is no secret of men that will not be judged by Christ Jesus.

Character is another quality that will be judged (Rom 2:5-11, ESV). People possess different talents, but talents need training and development before they can be explored. Character can be developed by following of the teaching of Scripture to build a Christ-like character. To be Christ-like would be the life goal.

Our work and service are subject to judgment (1 Cor 3:13-15, ESV). Everyone wishes to have achievements, so the desires and ideas of what a person wants in his heart will motivate activities and actions taken. If the works and service achieve a good consequence and receive praise, then the person would be full of joy but not necessarily followed by peace and love. Achievements may cause jealousy and feelings of injustice. Therefore, competition in sports needs clear game rules and fair referees or umpires. Otherwise, the achievement may cause even more painful experiences. Therefore, our works and achievements must be considered by the

final judgment of God, not the people around us. Most of the time we know the truth in our hearts. Each person must be honest in the judgment.

Further, our motivations will be judged (1 Cor 4:5, ESV). Many times, motivation is kept deeply in a person's heart and is not easily identified, as it could be covered with many colorful disguises. People would learn from the history of an individual: in daily life people need not learn how to lie, but they can be liars. Many advertisements, talk shows, and propaganda may hide the true motivation of heart. But everyone should remember no one can hide anything from God, and at the judgment people must confess all the motivations that were in their hearts.

Moreover, our behaviors will be judged (Eph 6:7-9, ESV). The Holy Spirit reminds Christians what behaviors are expected by God. Many people will serve well and behave properly when they are in front of their bosses, but this behavior is dangerous and inappropriate. For God is invisible, yet he watches over all of people's actions and behaviors.

Finally, people will be judged based on whether they acted with love (Col 3:18–4:1, ESV). The relationship among people requires faith, hope, and love, and issues in relationships can be solved by love. The relationship within a family and with other people needs love to function well. God wants people to function as if people are walking together with Jesus. Always ask oneself: What would Jesus do? This helps us to keep good relationships and to be full of Christ-like love for others.

What are the rewards of the judgment?

A reborn Christian is a member of God's kingdom, a son or daughter of God, and an heir who will receive an inheritance. A true Christian will receive different levels of reward

according to the judgment of his or her performance as described in Scripture. A short list of rewards follows.

One reward is to receive joy, unashamed (1 John 2:28, NIV). Christians will receive peace, joy, and love, which money cannot buy, and which are the most important reasons for people to live on earth. Christians in the future will live in these models in heaven together with the Lord in his kingdom.

A second reward is to receive praise (Matt 25:21, NIV). Praise from God as a faithful servant will be the best gift for Christians who follow Jesus. It is confirmation from God himself and will last forever. What honor can be higher than this? A wise person will do the right things to win this praise.

A third reward is to receive responsibility and authority (Matt 25:14-30, NIV). This is a well-known principle that the world proclaims today; but the difference is that a Christian would not work for higher position or responsibility. Receiving more responsibility and position is a result of good works, and Christians should aim to obeying God's words and mission.

A fourth reward is to receive position (Matt 19:29-30, NIV). We easily fail to honor God first, for the dark side of human nature does truly exist and people are greedy for positions, titles, and status. However, in heaven positions will depend on the works people did during their lifetime on earth.

Fifth, rewards will be given after people have been tested by fire and the goal is achieved (1 Cor 3:12-14; Phil 3:14, NIV). It is important to consider what kind of materials we used to build our metaphorical buildings. A clean heart and pure mind will determine the materials we choose. All motivations will be evaluated.

A sixth and final reward is to receive a crown. This may be a forever crown (1 Cor 9:25, NIV), a crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8, NIV), a crown of life (Col 1:12, NIV), a crown of glory (1 Pet 5:4, NIV), or a crown of a victor (Rev 2:10, NIV).

How will Christians prepare for the judgment?

To prepare for the judgment, Christians are to revere and respect God (2 Cor 5:10-11; Phil 2:12; 1 Pet 1:17, NIV). The fact is that all people will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, beginning with Christians. While people are on earth, God seems invisible to us, and so human nature leads people to pretend he is absent. To obey the Lord's principles and to do his commands, we need to make decisions from our hearts: do we do right or slack? When we revere, respect, and love God, Christians are willing to follow Jesus and will receive reward afterwards.

Christians are to be pure in heart, exercise self-control, and be faithful in the practice of prayer (1 Pet 4:5-8, NIV). A pure heart, self-control, and the practice of prayer are required by God and will receive praise and reward from him. Such discipline is not impossible, but it is difficult because of human nature. Christian maturity is a growing process, and to achieve a mature standard requires consistent effort to strengthen one's spiritual life. Growth in Christian life is achieved gradually. Purity of heart, self-control, and the practice of prayer are lifetime lessons for a Christian. Godliness is our goal to achieve.

Christians are to demonstrate a new lifestyle (2 Pet 3:11-13, NIV), as a new and different spirit is in one's new heart. Christians are to be witnesses of God to show the world how God can change one's life. Christians live not to follow the world's standard and system of values (e.g., they are not greedy for money and fame), but to pursue a Christ-like lifestyle.

Such a lifestyle includes being merciful and good-hearted to others (Matt 5:7; 2 Tim 1:16-18, NIV). Jesus showed his love to many sinners and sick people; many miracles were performed because he had mercy on people in need. Paul had compassion for others and appreciated people who had mercy on him. This is a two-way learning course.

Mission

Christians are to preach the gospel to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt 24:14, HCSB and AMP).

Proclaim and Preach the Gospel

To proclaim and preach the gospel to all nations is the mission of all Christians (Rom 10:12-15, NIV). “All nations” includes all lands with human beings in them, no matter how far the place or how different the cultures, nationalities, languages, customs, or traditional religions. The gospel needs to be preached and proclaimed, and then the end of the world will come and the final judgment will occur. Therefore, there is a time limitation for the task. Jesus and his disciples always proclaimed that the kingdom is near, and people need to repent.

God’s Plan Fulfilled

God’s plan will be fulfilled step by step, and God’s plan often involves Christians’ activities. The miracles of Jesus often involve human action.

At the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11, NIV), Jesus’ mother told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Jesus filled the water jars with good wine and satisfied the guests. By the actions of the servants, Jesus revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

With five loaves and two small fish (John 6:5-11, NIV), Jesus provided all the food needed for a crowd. Jesus did a miracle in front of all the people and demonstrated his authority and power. The glory of God then appeared among the people.

If Jesus had wanted, he could have given an order, and the stone would have been removed by his words and commands (John 11:38-42, NIV). Instead, Jesus asked people to move the stone from Lazarus's tomb, and the result was that the people experienced the manifestation of God. After his prayer to God, people would believe that Jesus was sent by God.

Jesus could make a coin to pay the tax (Matt 17:26-27, NIV), but the miracle was done by involving Peter's fishing. God is pleased to involve his disciples to take part in an action.

This incident of the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:4-11, NIV) illustrates a lesson about obedience and the supernatural power of Jesus. God's knowledge is much higher than our experiences. Normally, Christians use a logical way of thinking to judge things, but God's power is far beyond our imaginations. Jesus used this incident to announce the life mission of Peter. When Peter obeyed God's order, his eyes would be opened, and new paths opened for him.

Objective

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his disciples in turn to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20, HCSB and AMP). After his resurrection, Jesus presented himself to the eleven disciples, and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The disciples received the power and authority to be Jesus' witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:4, 8, 14; 2:1-4, HCSB).

Understanding the Great Commission

For contemporary Christians, the mission is the same, the objective is clear, and the Commander in Chief of the universe, with all authority from God, has promised that he will be with Christians to finish the tasks to the end of the world. Action will be required, as Jesus commanded, “Go.” The mission is not standing or only talking but moving forward no matter how hard the soil. There is no turning back while working on the farm.

The disciples of Jesus received power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, and they obeyed God’s command, waited until the time came, and devoted themselves to prayer. Jesus authorized the disciples to be his witnesses and provided them with the power to preach and proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

The Great Commission is not about increasing the number of church members, nor is the goal to build a wonderful world. Many people have shifted the goal as being to make more believers, to have more people be baptized as a Performance Measure Indication (PMI), and to build a good reputation and gain personal praise. However, the Great Commission focuses on saving the spiritual lives of people.

Making Disciples

To make a sound disciple is not a one-day mission. Discipleship is a process, with steps of growth. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a disciple needs a mentor to guide and watch over the growth of the mentee. When the growth reaches a period of greater maturity, the mentee will become a mentor. This model was presented by the apostle Paul and Timothy. In this thesis-project, this model is called “train the trainer.”

A disciple not only is called by the title but also must fully accept and receive salvation. When one believes in the name of Jesus, salvation saves the sinner's life and washes all sins away because of the blood of Jesus shed in his death on the cross for the world's sins. A disciple believes in Jesus' resurrection and that he will come again to judge the world. At last Jesus will bring Christians to live with him in heaven.

A disciple must experience life change, that is, to be reborn, which means to live a new life that is different from the world's value systems, worldly life purpose, and worldly fame and wealth. A disciple separates himself or herself from what the physical body wants or to be lazy and not do what one should achieve.

Disciples are baptized by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Holy Spirit. Disciples put God first in life and serve him as the only master. They do what is to be done and do it well: serve God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength. Disciples strive to love their neighbors as themselves, to have Christ-like vision, and to observe the needy and to have mercy on the poor and the sick.

A disciple needs gradually to know God well and expects to serve God more correctly. He or she will love God more deeply, growing in Christ not only for oneself but to love and care for others. The path of growth includes trials, suffering, and hard times, but growth will remain. A disciple learns lessons from the Scriptures and other Christians, and he or she one day will be a fine example to younger Christians.

Strategy

The strategy for Christians is to rely and depend on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17, 21-26, AMP).

To love God is to keep his commands. The promises and blessings a disciple would receive come only by keeping God's commands. Further, Christians receive a Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners—the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is within the heart of a disciple, that person receives support and help, spiritually, mentally, and physically. The blessings are received through the promises of the Giver, who owns everything; all kinds of resources are found in his hand. The Giver is God himself. He is the only reliable Giver and will always fulfill his promises if the receivers are willing and obedient to his Word (Isa 1:19, NIV).

The Lord has all authority in heaven and on earth, and disciples obey him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God in one and function simultaneously. The Father gives Jesus all authority, power, glory, and the kingdom. Jesus was sent to the world and fulfilled the mission that was assigned by the Father. When Jesus lived on earth, every detail had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Step by step Jesus gradually fulfilled his mission according to God's schedule. After Jesus was baptized, he was proclaimed the Son of the Father. After he went through trials and tests, Jesus started to select his disciples and trained them by living with them. Therefore, the disciples were able to observe and learn. It is an important principle that learners will need to obey their teachers and masters. Obedience will not be forced but comes from appreciation and respect. Jesus obeyed the Father, and so should his disciples obey him. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples on Pentecost; Jesus asked the Father, and he gave the wonderful gift. The Holy Spirit will be with Christians always.

The link is that Jesus obeyed the Father, and the Father's teaching was what Jesus taught, because Jesus said that all his words and works came from the Father. Jesus was not preaching himself but the Father, and those who learned his commands and obeyed would be praised and

would receive love from Jesus and so from the Father. Jesus promised that he will reveal himself to those who obey his command.

The Holy Spirit will be with Christians and guide us; the Trinity will be with us always (Matt 28:20, NIV). The Holy Spirit was sent on behalf of the Son and would teach Christians all things that the Father and the Son have taught. The Holy Spirit will recall and remind Christians of all things they have learned. This gift and promise will last forever if Christians listen to his voice.

Tactics

The Great Commandment is to love God and neighbors (Mark 12:28-34, HCSB and AMP).

The Lord our God is one, and a disciple must serve the only God. God is a jealous God. The Lord is the disciple's master, so one cannot serve the world (money) and the one Lord. A disciple cannot be loyal to two masters. No one would receive rewards by serving two masters, and often one easily puts himself into temptation by wishing to receive both worldly wealth and doing wrong against the only God. With a double-minded heart one cannot be a disciple.

Love for God starts from the disciple's heart and includes the soul, mind, and strength; a person's physical, mental, and spiritual parts need to surrender to God. People can promise with their mouths but not with their hearts, which is a kind of cheating. This cheating would not be accepted by God, for God is the truth, the way, and the life. God requires a pure heart to face him. Absolute loyalty is required to be a faithful disciple.

A person who does not love himself or herself will not be able to love others, for that person does not know what love is. Often people find excuses to hurt themselves, but one who

rightly loves himself or herself will not continue in harmful habits, as those habits would damage the spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of the person. Human beings are naturally selfish but choosing laziness or ease for a wrong joy is a sin. To love one's neighbor includes love for good persons and bad persons. Even one's enemies or a person who hurts one may be, through the teaching of God, a blessing for one to learn endurance, patience, and loving unlovely friends, classmates, and all different human beings.

After Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened, and a voice said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." Baptizing and teaching in the name of the Trinity are not only for understanding in the mind but also relate to the functions of the soul and the spirit. Therefore, baptizing and teaching will involve the higher level of God's functioning. The Holy Spirit will come into the heart of a Christian and remind the Christian what he or she has learned. When a Christian goes on a wrong path, the Holy Spirit will warn him or her to change back to the right track.

Summary

Jesus and his disciples lived together for about three and half years on earth as mentor and mentees, His disciples observed all his behaviors, learned his teachings and responses in different situations, and his heart (John 14:21, HCSB). Many examples were recorded in the New Testament. The disciples soon received the Holy Spirits to lead them continuously, just as their Mentor had. This is an excellent example of leadership to learn.

The Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment will be applied to all the universe, and to love God and neighbors is what Christians must focus on (Matt 22:37-40, NIV). Without love, no disciple can be formed. The mentor needs to love the mentees, a good Christian

leader needs to lead by love, and a teacher needs to love the students. The mentee needs to love the mentor, a follower needs to love the leader, and a student needs to love the teacher. Thus, will a joyful relationship be formed, but where is the love to be found? Only with Jesus' help can we love and be loved. Jesus said, "The one who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him" (John 14:21, NASB).

CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The goal of this research is trying to find a mentor-mentee practice which may be able to build an effective Chinese Christian discipleship way for overseas Chinese Christians. In this research, the first group of people acts as mentees—the people who are young adults and converted as Christians while they did their advanced study in North America. Unfortunately, quite a few of them lost their faith to Christ when they went back to China;¹ in this research, this group of people is called “lost faith Christian returnees” (LFCR). One possible solution for this phenomenon would be promoting the second group of people, called “senior retired Chinese Christians” (SRCC), to act as mentors—the people who came to North America for advanced study during the 1950 through the 1980s and gained higher education degrees. After graduation, many of them worked in sound jobs and experienced different fields in North America for many years. They normally possessed and generated good work records. Now they are retired (age sixty and over) and at this time are physically healthy. One outstanding point is that they have multiple experiences, so that they could communicate remotely (through a website) with people around the world and provide advice and guidance.

The designated mentor candidates (SRCC) originally came mainly from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or southeast Chinese Christian communities. They used the same Chinese language; many of them involved themselves in the Chinese Campus Bible study groups from the early years and later served in North American Chinese churches (in 2019 there were more

1. Han Zhang, “Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home,” *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2017, accessed September 10, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/26/chinese-converted-out-west-are-losing-faith-back-home-christian-churches-study-abroad>.

than fifteen hundred Chinese churches established in North America, even though there were very few in the 1960s). How can the SRCC become mentors or coaches to LFCR? The author's research question is "How can mature Chinese Christians living in America be trained as effective mentors or coaches (spiritual parents) for expatriate Chinese converts, including college students, preparing a return to China?" Thus, the mentor will be in a long-term service mode, and mentors or coaches will be asked to involve themselves in the areas of spiritual life, daily life, working ethic, and family issues of LFCR to offer guidance and support.

This chapter will be categorized in three key areas—discussions, references, and summaries—of about ten to twenty key sources (books or articles) for each area. The first major section will be about mentoring, discipleship, and leadership; the second major section will be about individual persona character analysis for the mentor and mentee in practice; and the third major section will be about the Chinese overseas students' LFCR phenomena and the current China religious regulations for Christian house churches.

Mentoring, Discipleship, and Leadership

Originally, the word *mentor* is from the language of ancient Greek mythology and refers to one who is a counselor, sponsor, patron, godfather, or advisor.² In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the word was often used to mean guidance for a young man to enter a military service field; later, some scholars found that mentorship is one of the most effective ways to develop young people's commitment and self-concept.³ As leaders are important in the

2. C. Dutton, "Mentoring the Contextualization of Learning—Mentor, Protégé, and Organizational Gain in Higher Education," *Education & Training* 45, no. 1 (2003): 22-29; M. Woodd, "Mentoring in Further and Higher Education: Learning from the Literature," *Education & Training* 39, nos. 8-9 (1997): 333-43.

3. C. R. Bell, "The Mentor as Partner," *Training & Development* 54, no. 2 (2000): 52-56; D. J. Levinson, C. N. Darrow, M. H. Levinson, and B. McKee, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

modern world, how does one find a qualified leader, and how is a mature leader formed to handle the complexity and systemic problems of a situation? Will a leader be selected from inside or from outside? These questions have been discussed very broadly.⁴ The mentoring relationship usually exists between an experienced older person and a less-experienced younger person.⁵ Often a mentor acts as a counselor and friend and provides a role model who is accepted by the mentee.⁶ Scholars recognize that mentorship would help the mentee to define personal values, follow the model of leadership habits, and speed up the learning process.⁷

Mentoring is one of the oldest and best methods of learning.⁸ Smith considers the example of Pastor Raymond Charles Stedman (October 5, 1917–October 7, 1992), an evangelical Christian pastor and author. Raymond was a long-time pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, and author of several books. He always had a few young staff who would travel together; by working, eating, learning, discussing, and observing together, they delineated the principles of the gospel. Another story is of the famous pianist Leonard Bernstein:

4. W. Bennis, "The Challenges of Leadership in the Modern World," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 1 (2007): 1-5; C. M. Campbell, M. Smith, J. P. Dugan, and S. R. Komives, "Mentor and College Student Leadership Outcomes: The Importance of Position and Process," *The Review of Higher Education* 35, No. 4 (summer 2012): 595-625; R. A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

5. E. C. Shapiro, F. P. Haseltine, and M. P. Rowe, "Moving Up: Role Models, Mentors, and the 'Patron System,'" *Sloan Management Review* 19, no. 3 (1978): 51-58.

6. K. E. Kram, "Improving the Mentoring Process," *Training and Development Journal* 39, no. 4 (1985): 40-43; K. E. Kram, *Mentoring at Work: Developing Relationships in Organizational Life* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1988).

7. V. M. Godshalk and J. J. Sosik, "Does Mentor-Protégé Agreement on Mentor Leadership Behavior Influence the Quality of a Mentoring Relationship?," *Group & Organization Management* 25, no. 3 (2000): 291-317; A. Kezar, *Rethinking Leadership in a Complex, Multicultural, and Global Environment: New Concepts and Models for Higher Education* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009); K. E. Kram and L. A. Isabella, "Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development," *Academy Management Journal* 28 (1985): 110-32; S. D. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000); M. Popper and R. Lipshitz, "Putting Leadership Theory to Work: A Conceptual Framework for Theory-Based Leadership Development," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 14, no. 7 (1993): 23-27; T. A. Scandura, M. J. Tejada, W. B. Werther, and M. J. Lankau, "Perspectives on Mentoring," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 14, no. 7 (1996): 51-58.

8. F. Smith, "Mentoring That Matters: Reviving an Ancient Teaching Method That Adds Life to Ministry," *Leadership* (winter 1999): 94-98, <https://www.Leadershipjournal.net>.

a young man came to Bernstein and wished to become a mentee and learn from this top professional. When the young man initiated the contact, Bernstein said to him, “Tell me what you want to do, and I will tell you whether or not you’re doing it.” “You are responsible for your playing and your practice. The one thing you can’t do is to hear yourself as a great pianist hears you.” These examples show that mentoring is an everyday, living relationship between the mentor and mentee, with progress and practices to which both sides agree and will follow. The relationship will break when one side does not fulfill the agreement.

One of the best examples of mentoring is Jesus and his disciples. After Jesus’ baptism, he was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil for forty days. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist declared, “Behold, the Lamb of God” (John 1:29-51), and two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus. In the Gospel of John, the initial contact seems to have been made by the disciples, yet in the other Gospel accounts (Matt 4:14-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11), calling the first disciples seems to have been initiated by Jesus. The most important thing is the mentoring needs to be initiated by the mentor or the mentee.

The leadership style of Jesus is to “Follow me!” Jesus empowered and authorized his disciples. Jesus demonstrated, the disciples observed and practiced, and Jesus gave them strengths and capabilities when the Holy Spirit was sent to continue Jesus’ teachings and guidance. After Jesus ascended to heaven to prepare places for us, and before Jesus’ second coming, the Holy Spirit has been acting as mentor on behalf of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is the lifetime mentor of all his disciples. The relationships are a long-term and a lifetime practice.

Today, to learn a skill or an art, normally the mentee will contact a professional who is a master in a specific area, such as a pianist or a carpenter. For example, in advanced education and academic areas, any master or doctoral student in a university needs a supervisor who is

qualified by the university. He or she accepts the student's application, with both sides understanding the topics and goals. Then the process can be started. Normally, mentoring is a one-on-one practice and relationship.

Many churches have experienced a disciple training program, but these programs seldom result in satisfaction, for they are conducted to meet once a week for about two hours, and more end as a Bible study or prayer meeting. The program lasts for eight to twelve weeks, which is no different from other Sunday school programs. Because a mature Christian is built over time, there can be no shortcut or fast-food-style approach. As an orange tree needs to grow about three to four years or more before its first fruit appears, so every mentee needs time to practice and grow. For one specific skill, it requires at least ten thousand hours to be able to barely master the skill. For example, in Taiwan, a motorcycle troubleshooting mechanical engineer needs three and half years to live and to workday and night with the mentor before he becomes a master and is mature enough to practice troubleshooting independently.

How can one make a good match between the mentor and the mentee? There is no fixed formula, but several basic requirements and understanding would need to be in place:

1. The mentor and mentee must share a compatible philosophy, and a good mentee grows by hearing unvarnished truth.
2. The mentor should be knowledgeable in the subject and objective in his criticism, and the mentee works to ask the right questions.
3. The mentor must genuinely believe in the potential of mentee, and a mentee must do his or her homework and climb to reach plateaus.
4. A good mentor helps define the vision, the goal, and the plan; and a mentee would admit his or her ignorance.

5. The chemistry must be good, and a mentee never tries to use his or her mentor.
6. The mentor needs the experience and originality to develop options rather than decisions, and a mentee is to develop his or her character.
7. The mentor must be able to commit to a person and to a situation, and a mentee initiates the request contact.
8. The mentor must be given permission to hold the mentee accountable, joy in the doing, and mutual trust and confidence.⁹

Compatible Philosophy and Growth through Unvarnished Truth

In this research project, both the mentors and the mentees should have a similar philosophy and belief, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, and have faith based on the Bible as God's Word, which is the most important source of Christian spiritual food. The Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of what God has told us. Both mentor and mentee should confirm they are reborn Christians and fully follow the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

Both mentor and mentee will proclaim that the mission on earth is to share the gospel to the end of the world (Matt 24:14); the purpose of life on earth is to be a witness of the Lord (Acts 22:15); the meaning of life on earth is to live for the Lord as Christ lives within me (1 Thess 4:1); the strategy of life on earth is to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love others as myself (Luke 10:27); and the hope on earth is to be called as a faithful servant and be invited by God to share the same table with him in heaven (Matt 24:45; 25:21, 23).

One of the philosophies and principles of mentors and mentees is to believe that God would not do what people should do, and people should not try to be God. For when God created people on earth in his image, human beings already possessed the spirit, mind, and strength to do

9. Smith, "Mentoring That Matters."

what should be done and do it efficiently and diligently. These mature believers should be the foundation from the beginning of the mentor and mentee relationships.

Knowledge and Objective Criticism and Asking the Right Questions

Mentoring is widely recognized as an exchange relationship that benefits the mentor and the mentee.¹⁰ It is important for the mentee to obtain a mentor for enhancing one's early-career development,¹¹ and the mentor's study is also to be emphasized.¹²

Most of the mentor candidates in this research were rewarded with advanced educational degrees. Not only are they knowledgeable, but also, they possess sound working experience gained through years of working in different fields. Besides, these SRCC have been involved in Bible study groups on campus while they were young, and later they were involved deeply in the development of Chinese churches in North America since the 1970s. During the period of building Chinese churches in North America, there were very few Chinese pastors; therefore, these mentor candidates participated in the Sunday sermons, Bible studies, youth group meetings, prayer meetings, and preparing Sunday lunches, as well as serving as babysitters or in

10. T. D. Allen, M. L. Poteet, J. E. A. Russell, and G. H. Dobbins, "A Field Study of Factors Related to Willingness to Mentor Others," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 50 (1997): 1-22; Kram, "Improving the Mentoring Process"; E. Mullen, "Framing the Mentoring Relationship in an Information Exchange," *Human Resource Management Review* 4 (1994): 257-81.

11. G. F. Dreher and R. A. Ash, "A Comparative Study of Mentoring among Men and Women in Managerial, Professional, and Technical Positions," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 (1990): 539-46; T. A. Scandura, "Mentoring and Career Mobility: An Empirical Investigation," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 13 (1992): 169-74; W. Whitely, T. W. Dougherty, and G. F. Dreher, "Relationship of Career Mentoring and Socioeconomic Origin to Managers' and Professions' Early Career Progress," *Academy of Management Journal* 34 (1991): 331-51.

12. S. Aryee, Y. W. Chay, and J. Chew, "The Motivation to Mentor among Managerial Employees," *Group & Organization Management* 21 (1996): 261-77; B. R. Ragins and J. L. Cotton, "Mentor Function and Outcomes: A Comparison of Men and Women in Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84 (1999): 529-50; B. R. Ragins, J. L. Cotton, and J. S. Miller, "Marginal Mentoring: The Effects of Type of Mentor, Quality of Relationship, and Program Design on Work and Career Attitudes," *Academy of Management Journal* 43 (2000): 1177-94.

other tasks. The result is that this group of people has been fully equipped and matured through hand-on work.

The disadvantageous factor of current mentor candidates is their low motivation to be mentors, as they are getting older, and after retiring with good pensions, they easily fall into the trap of staying in their comfort zone.

Human nature inclines people to get out of trouble or interferences in their accustomed daily schedule and activities. Moses is an example. When God's calling was revealed to him, Moses was reluctant to accept it but instead found many excuses for not taking the job. Often Christians' response, or lack of it, reflects what is recorded in Isaiah 6:8 (ESV): "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'" But no matter what the response of a called person, God's plan and schedule never delay or change. One principle in the Bible is that God's plan will ask the participation of human beings to fulfill it; God's hand is not short, but his grace expects to bring more blessings to those who respond with obedience.

The mentor candidates are knowledgeable and mature in many areas, especially in the experiences of Christian life, and the mentees also are well educated. However, in China it will be difficult for LFCRs to find a right person to ask questions or get living guidance with family issues (e.g., couples' conversation techniques, childrearing problems, relatives' and parents' communication, difficulties in the workplace). China's society is a highly competitive environment, and Christians are not favored within the society, because the social value system and life meaning, as well as life purpose, are very different. The government sets many restrictions for religious gatherings which may be caused by the fear of why people are gathering—the fear is they might use force against the government. Besides, the Chinese house churches have their own style (e.g., authorized leadership), and the status of LFCRs is that many

already have gained a higher education degree from foreign countries, and now LFCRs have returned to China, which has a very high social standard of achievement. Thus, the church leaders often share different viewpoints to be different and secure their positions. It would be difficult for the LFCRs to find a suitable mentor for guidance of Christian life.

The mentees' characteristics have positive influence on the mentors' decision to develop a mentoring relationship. If an SRCC has some experiences of mentoring others in the past, it will help motivate those people to accept the role of mentor. Most of the research on the advantages of acting as a mentor has some conclusions. For example, Zey lists four benefits for a mentor: career enhancement, intelligence/information, an advisory role, and psychic rewards.¹³ Mullen proposed the benefits are the personal satisfaction that comes from passing knowledge and skills on to others, exhilaration from the fresh energy provided by the mentee, improved job performance by receiving a new perspective from the mentee, loyalty and support from the mentee, and organizational recognition.¹⁴ However, mentors also facing the costs that will be associated with the mentoring, including other people's jealousy, the time demand, the possibility of mentees' disloyalty, or failures of the mentee.¹⁵

In this research, the mentors and the mentees are all Christians. The rewards of mentoring for both will focus on what will be the rewards from God, and they are different from the world's rewards. Christians should value that mentoring is from the love of God and follows God's commands. To receive God's confirmation as a faithful servant will be the best reward.

13. M. G. Zey, *The Mentor Connection* (Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1984).

14. Mullen, "Framing the Mentoring Relationship in an Information Exchange."

15. T. J. Halatin and R. E. Knotts, "Becoming a Mentor: Are the Risks Worth the Rewards?", *Supervisory Management* 27, no. 2 (1982): 27-29; B. R. Ragins and T. A. Scandura, "Gender Differences in Expected Outcomes of Mentoring Relationship," *Academy of Management Journal* 37 (1994): 957-71.

The subject and objective of this Christian mentoring research project is “To Train the Trainers” and “To share the gospel to the end of the world.” The mentor candidates are well trained and have life experience and therefore should be qualified to be mentors to the LFCR.

The LFCR are mainly young adults. The main reasons that they are unable to join local churches have to do with the churches, and they need only to find proper fellowship with proper seniors. The LFCR would not ask strange questions, and the pressures the LFCR faces are the many difficulties that the SRCC went through many years ago. Even the situations will be different, but basic problems and struggles will be solved together through faithful companionship.

The Potential of the Mentee and the Willingness to Work and Reach Plateaus

The willingness to be a mentor will be affected by choosing of a compatible mentee: what would attract mentors to mentees? There are two theories: the similarity-attraction paradigm and the social exchange theory.

The similarity-attraction paradigm posits that mentors will be attracted by those who are very much like themselves. They have a lot in common.¹⁶ The similar areas will include personality, character, gender, race, and original countries (e.g., England, France, Asia, or Germany for languages), and the same social background, food styles, habits, different regions with special dialects, or religion. In addition, scientific research fields, technical involvement, or anything similar will make it easier to talk or share, and that will help conversation processes.

One possibility is to group the mentors as a team (e.g., two couples or one couple with one or two individuals with different genders and backgrounds). It is likely that more similarities

16. D. Byrne, *The Attraction Paradigm* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1971).

will be covered, and two to four mentees as a small group will be able to observe others' performance to enhance everyone's perspectives.

The social exchange theory of mentoring holds that everyone believes the rewards will be greater than the costs in time, energy, or other factors.¹⁷ This cost-benefit balance should be considered in the selection of mentees.¹⁸ It has been shown that mentees with high performance and with technical knowledge will be more attractive to mentors.¹⁹ Other research found important factors that influenced the selection of mentees: the ability or potential of the mentee, and the willingness to learn.

In this research project, the mentor candidates (SRCC) are mainly very familiar with the language of Mandarin Chinese, Chinese cultural and traditional customs (e.g., Chinese Spring Festival [Chinese New Year], Chinese Autumn Festival [moon cake celebration]), but there are still some gaps and differences between the SRCC and LFCR in the areas of social systems, social value systems, educational background, and mindset. Therefore, for mentors and mentees to trust each other will be required for the mentoring practice. The concern of SRCCs for the well-being of the LFCRs will be one of the main motivations for mentoring. When Jesus saw a huge crowd, "he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matt 14:14, ESV). Without love, there will be no progress in anything. "If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2, ESV).

What is the goal of the mentoring practice between SRCCs and LFCRs? The main purpose will be having the LFCR find a Christian home with spiritual parents and continue to

17. P. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1964); G. C. Homans, "Social Behavior as Exchange," *American Journal of Sociology* 63 (1958): 597-606; J. W. Thibaut and H. H. Kelly, *The Social Psychology of Groups* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1959).

18. J. D. Olian, S. J. Carroll, and C. M. Giannantonio, "Mentor Reactions to Proteges: An Experiment with Managers," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 43 (1993): 266-78.

19. Kram, *Mentoring at Work*.

grow in Christ's love. And the SRCCs will be full of joy from serving the Lord, as they would spend time and energy with the LFCRs. Therefore, the SRCCs should have faith that the LFCRs will grow, follow God's Word, and do God's will accordingly.

Defining the Vision, Goal, and Plan and Admitting Ignorance

Mentoring others requires a great deal of time and energy. Much research indicates that mentoring will positively enhance the mentee's performance and growth in job satisfaction.²⁰ Mentors are seniors who have accumulated knowledge and wisdom that can be passed on to a more junior person. Similarity between the SRCCs and the LFCRs is important—for example, if both are or were in biomedical research, the SRCC will be much better able to give guidance or suggestions on workplace-related difficulties. Thus, the mentor will be better able to define a correct vision, goal, and plan for the mentee. If there are similar social backgrounds, that will help with suggestions about the local cultural customs, and if their families are from the same province, the special food styles will enhance communication. Although time can change many habits, a lot of customs and manners are still firmly kept in local society in China today.

Current young people wish to be able to openly discuss the issues they are facing daily, not to say the vision, goal, and plan, and in the past Chinese society would expect younger generations to obey parents, teachers, or bosses, no matter what. As the Chinese government has been transformed from military systems, it was used to receiving orders rather than expressing

20. T. D. Allen, M. L. Poteet, and S. M. Burroughs, "The Mentor's Perspective: A Qualitative Inquiry and Future Research Agenda," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 51 (1997): 70-89; G. T. Chao, P. M. Walz, and P. D. Gardner, "Formal and Informal Mentorships: A Comparison on Mentoring Functions and Contrast with Non-Mentored Counterparts," *Personnel Psychology* 45 (1992): 619-36; E. A. Ensher, C. Thomas, and S. E. Murphy, "Comparison of Traditional, Step-Ahead, and Peer Mentoring on Proteges' Support, Satisfaction, and Perceptions of Career Success: A Social Exchange Perspective," *Journal of Business & Psychology* 15 (2001): 419-38; E. A. Fagenson, "The Mentor Advantage: Perceived Career/Job Experiences of Proteges versus Non-Proteges," *Journal of Occupational Behavior* 10 (1989): 309-20; S. Seibert, "The Effectiveness of Facilitated Mentoring: A Longitudinal Quasi-Experiment," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 54 (1999): 483-502.

opinions. It is not allowed to ignore or go against orders from the higher-ranking persons in a military system. Therefore, these one-way communication habits should be changed gradually to more open environments. The contrasting phenomenon is that Generation Z goes too far sometimes, and they miss the chance to receive good advice. They just reject anything society tells them.

When a good match for a mentor and mentee is found, a more correct vision, goal, and plan will be defined. The similarities of the two sides will be much more important factors for the match of the mentoring relationship. Jesus' set the example in Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1 of sending disciples two by two, which is effective in sharing the mission objective.

Thus, this research project is designed to have an SRCC mentoring team of two couples or one couple with one or two individuals, for the two by two support each other. As a company, two couples will provide more possibilities for similarity, and if a senior becomes a single, he or she will join one couple as a team as two-by-two small team. The LFCRs will also be generated as small teams. The maximum number of individuals is either six families or twelve adults. This will better to cover time sharing and limitations on energy.

Good Chemistry and Not Taking Advantage of a Mentor

Mentoring is associated with a broad range of interests: behavioral, attitudinal, rational, or emotional, relational, motivational, and career outcomes.²¹ Mentoring is associated with positive behavioral outcomes; it is concerned about increasing desirable behavior and decreasing undesirable behavior.

21. Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima, "Outcomes Associated with Mentoring Proteges"; C M. Underhill, "The Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs in Corporate Settings: A Meta-Analytical Review of the Literature," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 68 (2006): 292-307.

Mentoring also is associated with positive attitudinal outcomes; it is expected that the mentees will develop positive attitudes toward the activities that they engage in with their mentors.

Mentoring is associated with positive rational or emotional outcomes; a mentor may listen and offer advice when mentees are stressed, or the mentor provides counseling on personal or job-related problems.²²

A mentor may also help the overall well-being of mentees by challenging their negative self-views,²³ which may enhance the mentees' self-confidence or self-esteem. Mentoring is associated with positive relational outcomes; the interpersonal relationship with parents' relatives, family members, and mentors may provide appropriate strategies to deal with interpersonal problems. A trusting, close relationship with a mentor may lead mentees to develop positive expectations about interpersonal relationships with others.

Mentoring is associated with positive motivational outcomes; the mentor may open mentees' eyes to different possibilities and motivate them to seek new experiences. A mentor may help mentees stay focused on a goal or tasks or help them redesign an achievable goal.

Finally, mentoring is associated with positive career outcomes. If the mentoring pair is in the same field of work, the mentor may introduce mentees to other contacts (e.g., letters of recommendation, a more detailed introduction to someone), as the mentor has more contacts and a reputation with friends who know each other. Hence, all persons will gain trust.

Some mentoring relationships have unhappy or unhealthy ends, which it caused by hurting the heart of a mentor. The reasons could be misconduct or wrongdoing in the

22. Kram, "Improving the Mentoring Process."

23. J. E. Rhodes, *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); J. E. Rhodes, "A Model of Youth Mentoring," in *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*, 30-43, ed. D. I. DuBois and M. J. Karcher (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

relationship. The mentor feels betrayed or used for mentee's benefit: for example, a mentee may present to the mentor a claim of serious and urgent need of money or support in an emergency, but the claim was a fraud. Or a mentee may write a letter that was not from the mentor, but it has been sent out on behalf of the mentor. In extreme cases, a mentee, acting from greed or jealousy, may engage in criminal behavior that may lead to the mentor losing money or reputation. Even when both sides have gone through many difficulties and gained trust in a close relationship, still things can happen. Only love and forgiveness can solve these kinds of problems.

Chemistry sometimes is not easily expressed, but everyone knows it is there. People may experience that with classmate—some of them become close friends, others would not; and in a classroom, a teacher would automatically favor some students and not treat all of them equally. These phenomena could be described people having chemistry.

Developing Options and Developing Character

The overall purpose of this research project is trying to develop Chinese Christian leaders. “To Train the Trainer” is the first principle. The LFCRs (mentees) are promising potential candidates for future Chinese Christian leaders because they have already experienced the love of Christ, and many have received Jesus as their Savior. Many of them attended Bible study classes and adult Sunday school courses while they were in foreign countries. They have also experienced struggles when they went back to China. Most of them received higher education degrees, and Chinese people will perceive this as having a good reputation. Through re-adoption of the new Chinese culture, they have received firsthand information of Chinese development and easily fulfill the government's new regulations. Not everyone was able to study

abroad in the past; only outstanding people would. Most of these LFCRs are intelligent and capable of doing tasks, and LFCRs need companies for their growth along the way.

The SRCCs in this research project are qualified mentors for the LFCRs. They were very well educated in North America; many of them have PhDs and more than twenty to thirty years of sound work experience in North America. These SRCCs experienced the development and establishment of Chinese churches since 1970, and even until now, they have been trained by God through on-the-job training. They can share Sunday sermons; conduct Bible study classes, prayer meetings, and committee meetings; prepare Sunday lunches; babysit; and visit needy families and sick people in the hospitals. There were no or very few Chinese pastors during that period. This is how they grew and developed themselves. Now they are retired and have time. While they were working, the demands were huge. They experienced time constraints, and even regret today they regret that they could not spend more time with their family, especially their children. They are now over sixty years old (some are around eighty) and are no longer actively involved in church ministries. This is not a good situation for their health, for the comfort zone is no comfort at all. Most of SRCCs are still healthy and available to be mentors. Because current ways of communication have changed dramatically, people are able to visit remotely as a normal way of communication. It will be easy talking face to face online.

Just as there are various coaches for an American football team, so this research project intends to develop a two-by-two small team mentorship practice. The purpose is to increase the similarity of the mentor-mentee matches. A one-on-one relationship will develop as the participants become closer to each other and the relationship matures. To gain deep trust will need time, and the hope is that this practice will demonstrate that it is a profound way to build leaders.

Commitment and Initiating Contact

Research shows that most effective way of increasing a mentee's efficiency and performance as a leader is to have been taught by a good mentor.²⁴

The objective of SRCCs is to commit to reinforcing values that enhance the ability of the LFCRs to be better leaders in the future. One important factor for leaders is their self-construal of their abilities to lead, and mentorship would serve as an important pathway to elucidate these goals.²⁵

A key point is that a relationship of trust between the mentor and the mentee will deeply impact the success or failure of building of a leader through the mentoring process. A good leader trainee as a mentee would engage himself by asking if his leadership techniques need to be improved, and the mentee always welcomes feedback, no matter if it is positive or negative. This feedback will accelerate his or her growth and will show greater commitment and earnestness in the mentee's job performance. Feedback is welcomed by the leader trainee as a mentee to determine if he or she is a candidate who can self-regulate and self-enhance. Confidence is a critical characteristic of a leader. Efficiency as a leader also requires psychological strength that will give a leader more flexibility and adaptability while facing challenges and situations.

24. L. T. Eby, T. D. Allen, S. C. Evan, T. Ng, and D. L. Dubois, "Does Mentoring Matter? A Multidisciplinary Meta-Analysis Comparing Mentored and Non-Mentored Individuals," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 72 (2008): 254-67; W. A. Gentry, T. J. Weber, and G. Sadri, "Examining Career-Related Mentoring and Managerial Performance across Cultures: A Multilevel Analysis," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 72 (2008): 241-53.

25. D. V. Day and M. M. Harrison, "A Multilevel, Identity-Based Approach to Leadership Development," *Human Resource Management Review* 17 (2007): 360-73; D. S. DeRue and S. J. Ashford, "Who Will Lead and Who Will Follow? A Social Process of Leadership Identity Construction in Organizations," *Academy of Management Review* 35 (2010): 627-47; S. T. Hannah, B. J. Avolio, F. Luthans, and P. D. Harms, "Leadership Efficiency: Review and Future Directions," *Leadership Quarterly* 19 (2008): 669-92; D. van Knippenberg, B. van Knippenberg, D. De Cremer, and M. A. Hogg, "Leadership, Self, and Identity: A Review and Research Agenda," *Leadership Quarterly* 15 (2004): 825-56.

There will be six suggested steps for conducting a leader training program within six months.

1. Establish the basis of the mentor-mentee relationship (roles and expectations). After the matching process for two-by-two teams, the SRCC and the LFCR have already exchanged their vitas (educational background, fields of interest, work records) and know the results of character tests (understanding each other's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and trends; see the next section of this thesis-project). The mentee should write an essay about his or her expectations: what they hope to gain and the understanding of the mentor's requirements.
2. Focus on the specific areas that the mentees have trouble or problems in daily life and leadership. Through discussion, mentors will analyze and help mentees to diagnose and find the root causes of the problems. The discussion should be centered on how to make changes, take charge as a leader, and resolve problems in the future. Mentee leaders should prepare the questions before the discussion with a two- to three-page essay.
3. Focus on the mentees' personal development goals. The mentors will discuss methods and opportunities or alternatives to reach those goals and share the mentors' own experiences. The mentees will prepare a two- to three-page essay about their goals for discussion.
4. Focus on how to lead effectively during tough moral or ethical circumstances. This conversation should focus on what kind of behaviors can be called good, and mentors will calm mentees and lead with wisdoms. The leader mentee will prepare some questions (two to three pages) for discussion.

5. and 6. Provide case discussions and time to share. For each time, mentors will select topics or events which will help for understanding a leader's proper responses and resolutions that will lead to a happy ending.

These six steps could happen for three months to six months. Each time is about an hour or two and depends on time arrangements. Website meetings (e.g., by Zoom) will go from two-by-two discussions and then one-on-one conversations. The expectation is that these sessions will produce growth on both sides.

Accountability and Joy and Trust

The overall purpose of this research project is to “Train the Trainer,” in other words, to train leaders who will be trainers so the evangelical mission will continue from generation to generation. Before SRCCs are given permission to hold LFCRs (mentees) accountable, a deeper understanding of each other's background will be required through an interview so that understanding will quickly land the relationship on solid ground. Two interview practices will be suggested to the mentors; this process will help the mentor to realize his or her role. When the mentor is accountable, he or she can then hold the mentee accountable.

Mentors need to understand their previous experiences of acting as a mentee or a mentor, or similar roles. What is the reason for accepting the challenge to be a mentor? What kind of experiences of the mentee or mentor role influenced his or her own life? What will be the challenges for a mentor? How will he or she handle new situations? What is the mentor's understanding of leadership and “To Train the Trainer”? How will the mentors handle the

different social and cultural aspects of the mentees? How will their mentorship lead the mentees to be better leaders?

After three months of practice, the interview questions will be: How has your leadership style changed? (If there is any change.) What are the most challenges you have faced? And how have you handled that? How do you navigate social and cultural changes, and how do you help your mentee? How do you think you have influenced the mentee to be a better leader?

One can expect results when SRCCs and LFCRs have mutual trust and confidence.

When mentors and mentees go through a designed development process, that results in a professional learning community. It provides opportunity for communication, and the growth of both persons will enhance the spread of gospel to the end of the world.

1. Mentors themselves will grow into better leaders as examples to the mentees. The mentors will need to participate and be involved in the mentees' activities, so that a real understanding will develop. This understanding helps mentees to incorporate the values and solve a problem effectively.
2. Relationship building will need time, but when the mentors and the mentees are serious, trust will come quickly when they decide to share more time together. Both mentors and mentees will be honest with each other about what they can or cannot do, or what they understand or do not understand. A clear signal will be required.
3. Mentors will need to introduce wisely more resources to help the mentees' growth in areas that are more complicated or more serious. As different experts may possess different talents or skills to better build the mentees, no selfishness will be allowed.

4. There will be different stages and different phases for the mentoring. Therefore, the mentors will need to be open-minded in their support of the mentees. With love from God, the mentors' hearts will help them to escape the temptation of selfishness.
5. Mentors will keep themselves as lifetime learners, and humble enough to learn from the mentees, as in cases where the mentees have expertise in some fields. When there is true love from God between the mentors and mentees, a joyful end can be expected.

Individual Character Analysis for Mentors and Mentees

The character of a human being is an amazing design of God.²⁶ Even identical twins show different character. Character is an area that people still do not understand thoroughly, but it will deeply influence the lifetime of a person, and character will not easily be changed, no matter how hard people work on it. Different characters contribute to different talents and outcomes of a team if that is properly arranged.²⁷

Christians are expected to be Christ-like, which refers to the virtues people should pursue for lifetime. God is love. "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Cor 13:4-8, NIV). Christ-like love is different from the character of a person, although character is a gift from God, and

26. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002); J. O. Hagberg and R. A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1989); Kenneth Boa, *That I May Know God: Pathway to Spiritual Formation* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1998).

27. J. M. Houston, *The Mentored Life: From Individualism to Personhood* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002); A. L. Winseman, D. O. Clifton, and C. Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-given Talents and Inspire Your Community* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2004).

there is no good or bad, just different. Through the Holy Spirit, Christians learn to work together for the kingdom of God and build virtues that receive rewards from the Lord. This is his promises.

Through character analysis, one will gain insight into what tendency he or she has in a certain situation or environment. For example, some people can do things consistently: this person is a reliable worker, can do repetitive, routine jobs daily, shows patience and consistency. But he or she might not easily create new plans or ideas or develop strategy for a marketing department. This person will be a good doer, not a planner. DiSC analysis will help the team understand each person's strengths and weaknesses and how best to organize the human resources to finish tasks as a team.²⁸

What Is DiSC?

This self-assessment tool is called DiSC: D= Dominance, I= Inducement or Influence, S= Submission or Steadiness, C= Compliance or Conscientiousness or Criticism. The DiSC assessment can be used to evaluate personal behavioral aspects.

Dominance (D) is referred to the control tendency of a person. Several scholars called this drive or self-actualization. Once a personality test shows Dominance as one's most prominent characteristic, it is possible he or she may have motivation to over-drive, or win his or her co-workers, or try to gain a leadership position in the workplace.

28. Kristeen Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, "Examples of 12 DiSC Personality Types—DiSC Profiles," 2021, www.discprofiles.com (D= Dominance, I= Inducement or Influence, S= Submission or Steadiness, C= Compliance or Conscientiousness or Criticism); Bob Buford, *Discovering Your Game Plan: Defining Your Opportunity to Make a Significant Difference* (n.p.: Leadership Network, 2005).

Influence (I) refers to one's ability to communicate and behavior in social situations. This character falls under the area of influencing people, which indicates friendship, enthusiasm, and optimism. Some suggest using the term influence and inducement interchangeably.

Steadiness (S) indicates a personality that includes characteristics such as stability, modesty, sincerity, and patience.

Conscientiousness or Compliance (C) is related to structural and organizational behaviors. With the C-dominant personality type, one may inherently have a task-oriented and contemplative style. By excelling at self-monitoring, one would value accuracy in daily tasks.²⁹

What Does a DiSC Assessment Mean?

To understand the meaning of a DiSC profile, all team members should recognize that the dominant behavioral dimensions would need to be understood as applying to one team together. For example, Dominance and Influence personalities could have outgoing aspects. Compliance and Steadiness, by contrast, are regarded as signals of people who are inward-looking or conservative.

A DiSC profile also shows the degree to which a person is task-oriented or people-oriented. Dominance and Compliance lead to a task-focused personality style, and individuals with Influence and Steadiness are people-oriented. It is not necessary here to go through the questions in the assessment; by looking at the descriptions listed below, readers will easily identify their tendencies.

29. Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, "Examples of 12 DiSC Personality Types—DiSC Profiles."

In the context of this research project, the SRCCs and LFRCs are adults, so their life experiences would indicate their specific areas of strength or weakness in their character. The purpose of the DiSC assessment is to help them to mutually understand each other in deeper ways and build their relationships.³⁰

What Is the Right Personality According to DiSC?

Everyone's personality consists of many different emotional patterns, behaviors, and cognitive functions. Anyone's characteristic sets are complex and unique, and there is no right or wrong personality, according to the DiSC assessment. The DiSC assessment is not to help a person change his or her personality, but it will help a person understand his or her natural reaction to a specific situation. With this tool, one can make lifestyle or environmental changes to fit his or her personality and progress. As a team member, one should use this information to understand all team members' strengths and weaknesses and organize them to optimize the team's productivity.³¹

The Lost Faith Christian Returnees Phenomena and Current Chinese House Churches

From 2016 to 2020, China's education sector made progress. The Ministry of Education (MOE) said at a press conference on December 23, 2020, that more than 2.5 million Chinese students studied abroad between 2016 and 2019, and 80 percent of these students returned to

30. Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, "Examples of 12 DiSC Personality Types—DiSC Profiles."

31. To learn more, see Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, <https://www.discprofiles.com/blog/2019/08/the-disc-di-style/>. There are links to descriptions of each personality style.

China after completing their programs. In 2020, the MOE had received more than 300,000 applications for credential evaluation and recognition from students studying overseas. The evaluation is necessary for one to apply for a new job in China. Students would receive a kind of certificate to prove the study is real, which university the person attended, and the courses selected. The number of applications has been raised about 10 percent (30,000) in 2019. The MOE is encouraging more students to return to China from overseas, for China will improve the quality of services, create more favorable job positions, and encourage entrepreneurs to offer more opportunities.³²

Several Christian organizations estimated how many Chinese overseas students converted to Christianity. The estimates varied, but it is from 5 percent to 10 percent. This means that of 2.5 million Chinese students, 80 percent (2 million) of whom return to China, the number of Christian returnees would be 100,000 to 200,000. Yet large numbers of converts seem to have lost their faith after coming back to China. Volunteers and missionary staff who have worked for years with Chinese students in the United States estimate that “80 percent of believers eventually stop going to church after returning home.”³³ It generally takes time for the returnees to find suitable places in China. Many are still searching for rules and appropriate behaviors so they can merge into the rapid economic and social changes. Another point is that current Chinese churches are operating under new rules of control, as China, officially communist, is an atheist state.³⁴ The number of Lost Faith Christian Returnees (LFCR) then will be calculated as 80,000 to 160,000. This would be a tremendous loss, but the salvation of God will never fail. Jesus told

32. Huaxia, “China’s Education Goes International from 2016 to 2020,” Xinhua, China Daily, December 23, 2020, accessed September 21, 2020, http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/ministries/202012/23/content_WS5fe27ba8c6d0f72576942539.html.

33. Zhang, “Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home.”

34. Zhang, “Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home.”

the parable of the Sower: some seeds fall on the rock, some are eaten by the birds, some stop growing in a harsh environment. Nonetheless, the shepherd has ninety-nine sheep already, but he will not abandon the one which gets lost. How should we react to the demand to save and help the lost ones?

Internal and External Reasons for the Loss of Christian Returnees in China

External Factors

Changes in social values

In 1976, many Chinese Communist Party leaders passed away, and the Cultural Revolution came to an end. In 1978, China started to reopen and to restart university entrance exams. In 1992, opening was extended, and foreign companies began to be able to enter Chinese markets. In 2001, China entered the World Trade Organization (WTO), learning how to manage and define regulations for most industries and how to do business and manage the country's finances. In 2008, the Beijing Olympic Games helped China to rebuild this old city. Also in that year, China experienced a serious earthquake. In response, all the provinces supported one another and a collaborative style in the whole country led to good outcomes. In 2018, economic war began between the United States and China, which made China recognize that the foundations of multiple technologies need to be built up. In 2021, the One Belt One Road initiative, a huge project of a new Silk Road, was redefined and enhanced. Chinese who were born in different time frames have been deeply affected by the changes in social status around them. For example, 800 million people in Mainland China have seen improvements from a very poor status. In forty years, from 1979 to 2019, China's economic growth has increased rapidly. Every ten years marks a new generation for the children; therefore, these generations have made

themselves quickly adopt to different social regulations and standards. Thus, the value system has been changed relatively fast as well.³⁵

There were many conflicts in the past owing to different social standards, and older people always needed to catch up to the new technologies, new regulations, and new values. The majority of Chinese returnees were born after 1976, so when they went back, they all needed to redefine themselves: How will I play a proper role to merge into the current social structures?

Different church styles

There are mainly two kinds of Christian churches in China. One is called three-self churches, which indicates that the church has self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation; the government requires transparency, and the churches need to follow the guidance of the government. The other is called house churches, which remain illegal for not going through a proper registration process. There are requirements of registration from the government that are not biblical or reasonable.

This struggle started in 1949, after the new country first formed. The Chinese Communist Party demanded all foreign missionaries leave the country and forbade churches to receive financial support from other countries, since the party members considered that churches can form a great power against the government.

Returnees who have experienced Western-style church settings often have difficulties integrating into the churches in China. And the churches are very different, in that the structure of house churches is quite centralized; normally, the senior pastor has authority to oversee almost

35. Huaxia, “China’s Education Goes International from 2016 to 2020”; Chinese Communist Party, “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Beliefs,” white paper, April 3, 2018, accessed September 3, 2019, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1626734/1626734.htm>; J. Li and L. Zhao, “The Costs of Socializing with Government Officials: A New Measure of Corporate Political Connections,” *China Journal of Accounting Research* 8 (2015): 25-39, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cjar.2014.10.003>.

everything. Many returnees have the intention to change this structure, which has caused many problems. Some Chinese pastors are forbidden to engage with the returnees due to their much higher level of education. One of the issues is that some teachings were not accurate enough, and the sheep found not enough spiritual food to be fed. This is not to mention some workers violate the biblical principles on handling wealth or even committing adultery.³⁶

Workplace pressure

When the returnees come back to China, usually they already have some connections in China, but those who need to find jobs after they land in China will face rigorous situations. China is a very relationship-related society, so if one does not have strong relationship bonds, one would not easily find a job, even in many foreign branch offices. One's resume would be useful for an introduction by a friend, a relative, or a classmate. Companies usually have some candidates for interviews already available. This is totally different from the United States or another foreign country. When one successfully enters a job, the competition starts, and the wave of performance pressure can drive one into a very difficult situation. One interview with a returnee said, "Theoretically, we should prioritize God over everything else, but real-life scenarios often don't permit that."³⁷

36. Xin Wang, "Uncertainty for Chinese Students in the United States," January 2, 2021, accessed September 22, 2021, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org>; Zhang, "Chinese Converted Out West Losing Faith at Home."

37. X. Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* (2018): 1-22, Doi: 10.1093/cjip/poy001, <http://academic.oup.com/cjip/article-abstract/11/1/1/4844055>.

Family expectations

Family is crucial in a Chinese person's lifetime. Tradition encourages a person to never ignore relatives' concerns. Family reputation would drive a Chinese to realize that there is a need to be good or outstanding, and not to be considered blameworthy in relationships (e.g., within the family, such as uncles, or outside of the family, such as a boss). Parents are proud when their children get opportunities to receive advanced education in foreign countries. Nonetheless, when a person finishes the training and comes back to China, the first questions people ask would be, "Why came back? Could not find a job there? Can't make big money? Are you married?" There would be a tone in these questions, and it can make a person lunatic. Especially for those whose parents are unbelievers, the conflicts would cause issues within a family.

China's one-child policy started in the 1980s, and most of the current returnees are in this age range. The only child receives support from all members of the family: not only parents, but also both sets grandparents and even other relatives all contribute to one's advanced education (including airfare, tuition, costs of living), and they naturally have expectations of one's achievement. One will not easily to ignore the expectations and concerns.³⁸

Internal Factors

Values and beliefs

Christians value God's point of view, and the meaning of their lives would rely on the teachings of God through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. But the world's values would be introduced through media, through all the channels and platforms; fashion; and an emphasis on individuality. People all around would challenge one's biblical beliefs. One would not stand if he

38. Yan, "Chinese Values versus Liberalism"; Y. Kun and C. D. Berliner, "Chinese International Students in the United States: Demographic Trends, Motivations, Acculturation Features and Adjustment Challenges," *Asia Pacific Education Review* 12 (2011): 173-84.

or she dares not to fight back. If one cannot demonstrate his or her beliefs in daily life, it is easy to lose the spiritual war.³⁹

Life goals

God has a plan for everyone, and the plan is designed for a lifetime on earth. God's plan builds us to be his witnesses on earth; the reality for returnees to China is that they would be attacked fiercely according to the world's standards and might struggle to live a life that God wants. If the returnee is one person alone, it would be more difficult for survival under these pressures. Therefore Jesus sent out his disciples using a two-by-two strategy, and a good mentor would support a returnee who feels alone.⁴⁰

Current Religious Regulations on Christians in Chinese House Churches

Mainland China adopted the materialism of Marxism, the ideology of which was that a sound society led to a harmonious world. China practiced the theory by conducting People's Communes, which meant the collectivization of agriculture. However, the theory ended as a disaster in communist Russia around 1930 and in China in the 1950s. Marxism does not recognize that a human being is a creation of God. During China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all religions were forbidden, all the churches were closed, and all temples also were closed, because Marxism is atheistic. But the underground house churches were booming during this period. The gospel of God cannot be seized by authority.

39. YWAM, "Generation Z—Shocking Statistics about Beliefs and Sexuality," 2019, accessed August 16, 2019, <http://www.billionbibles.com/generation-z.html>; Li and Zhao, "The Costs of Socializing with Government Officials."

40. Wang, "Uncertainty for Chinese Students in the United States."

Today in China, Communist Party members are asked to swear that they believe in no religion. Teachers, from all grades in school up to university professors, or medical doctors of any kind, even bankers, are asked to sign the paper to declare that they believe in no religion. This policy extends to all the transportation drivers who work for the government, for the government supervises all these public organizations.

After China's reopening in 1978, the pressures on religion have been relieved gradually; in 2001, the city house churches started to build. Unfortunately, when the churches grew to a degree, some problems began to occur. In 2017, the huge crosses were torn down in many churches, and all pastors fell into persecution. There was a need of being united, and the pastors' prayer meetings started to be organized. But before that happened, the churches competed with one another in terms of property and the number of congregations. The city house churches were competing for the wrong indicators, and the government restrictions helped clean the wrongdoings of the city house churches.

The new regulations on religion were issued in 2018, the main sections of which are listed below. The purpose for this long post is to prevent incorrect interpretation of what the government says in its official document.

Freedom of religious belief is protected by the Constitution. According to Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion." Article 36 also stipulates that "No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the State," and that "Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign control." These stipulations serve as the constitutional basis for the State in protecting citizens' freedom of religious belief, administering religious affairs in accordance with the law and building positive relations with and among religions. Freedom of religious belief is protected by basic laws. China's Criminal Law, National Security Law, and Counter-Terrorism Law provide for the protection of citizens' freedom of religious belief. The principle of equal protection for all Chinese citizens is enshrined

in the Election Law of the National People's Congress and Local People's Congresses, Organic Law of the People's Courts, Organic Law of the People's Procuratorates, Organic Law of the Urban Residents Committees, Organic Law of the Villagers Committees, Criminal Procedure Law, Education Law, Labor Law, Employment Promotion Law, and Trade Union Law. These laws stipulate that all citizens enjoy equal rights to vote and stand for election to people's congresses at all levels and to community-level self-government organizations, the right to equality before the law, the right to education, the right to work and to free choice of employment, and the right to join or organize trade unions in accordance with the law, irrespective of religious belief. The Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy states that organs of self-government in ethnic autonomous areas shall guarantee citizens of all ethnic groups the freedom of religious belief. According to the Law on the Protection of Minors, minors enjoy equal rights to life, development, protection, participation, and education in accordance with the law, irrespective of their religious belief. The Advertisement Law prohibits any advertisements that contain any information that discriminates against religions. The Criminal Law stipulates that worker of State organs involved in serious cases, which illegally deprive citizens of their right to freedom of religious belief, shall be investigated for criminal responsibility. The General Provisions of the Civil Law states that a lawfully established place of worship qualifying as a legal person may register for the status of legal person to accept donation.⁴¹

Despite the views of any human government, as God reigns in all situations, the gospel will be shared to the end of the world. Jesus will be coming back again to a new page.

41. Chinese Communist Party, "China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Beliefs."

CHAPTER 4

OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

After they graduate and return to China, many overseas Chinese Christian students do not go to church anymore, so a priority of this thesis-project will be to seek solutions to this problem. One proposed solution is the “Train the Trainers Project,” in which the trainer candidates will be senior overseas Chinese Christians who are well educated (this fact will attract students) and have sound professional work experience. All these candidates are familiar with Bible truth, for they have been believers for many years and speak Chinese. These mature Christians are fifty-five and older and will have served churches intensively in the past. Their experiences have been built through at least twenty to thirty years. Above all, they are not only spiritually suitable and full of life experience but additionally have time available to serve because they are retired.

Nonetheless, some of the trainer candidates did not grow up in Mainland China, which means they have a very limited understanding of the changes in China since 1949. Therefore, it will be necessary to provide enough information about China for them. This author intends to provide a set of courses to fill the gaps, along with motivating the seniors to get out of their comfort zone. How will they act as mentors (spiritual parents) with the love of Christ? It will heavily depend on God’s calling, and the mentor’s role is a long-term relationship with the mentee, following the pattern of “to train the trainers” (2 Tim 2:2). Such a pattern was built by Jesus with his disciples and by the apostle Paul with Timothy.

The research question for this thesis-project is, can mature Chinese Christians living in North America be trained as effective mentors for expatriate Chinese converts (including college students) preparing to return to China?

Methodology

Preliminary Questionnaire and Interviews

A first version of a questionnaire, developed in consultation with the author's advisor, was sent to prospective mentors but did not receive an adequate response. This questionnaire was sent by email, and the expectation was that it would be returned by email. However, senior Christians needed to have preliminary promotion and information before they responded to the survey.

In addition, the author conducted unofficial interviews with nine seniors and four students.

Rev. Edwin Su and the author discussed the idea of senior mentors in Beijing, Los Angeles, California, and Lancaster, Pennsylvania (see the preface of this thesis-project for details and chronology).

Elder C. K. Hsu met with the author many times since 2004 in Beijing. He endorsed the idea of mentorships but said his experience is that it will take quite a long time to fully gain trust with the people from Mainland China. Elder Hsu offered time and money for the website (e.g., free downloadable Chinese Bibles and other related products), which have been helpful. However, the Chinese government restricted the Bible download in 2020.

Elder Lin, a board member of Ambassador for Christ (AFC), a successful businessman, and a faithful servant of the Lord, met several times with the author at conferences.¹ He expressed concern about the huge number of Chinese students and that Chinese Christians do not know how to do that.

1. Ambassador for Christ (AFC), headquartered in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, has served overseas Chinese Christians since 1963. Its departments include campus ministry, general ministry, Chinese resource ministry, bookstore/publication, Chinese mission convention, and conferences and training ministry. Its budget from January 2021 to October 2021 was \$3,277,210 (US).

Elder Paul Tseng, also a board member of AFC, asked the author many questions about China, because he was planning to meet his brother in China. They had never met because Paul was born in Taiwan and his elder brother was left in China; Paul wondered what to say or not say. Elder Lin agreed to distribute the questionnaire to seniors in his church.

Roger I. Kung, another board member of AFC, has published three Christian books about workplace theology and leadership, and student evangelical works. He held a high rank in a successful technology company and conducted many lectures in many different churches and conferences. His wife also is active in teaching about Christian work and family and ethics.

Elder Lin agreed to distribute the questionnaires in his church in Plano, Texas. He confirmed that more than 65 percent of his congregants are from Mainland China and that the church wants to find effective ways to reach Chinese overseas students in their region.

Dr. K. Lam has worked with a church youth group and agreed with the metaphor of the kite: if young people have a mentor, they will grow in Christ. The second-generation overseas Chinese also face challenges, and youth group ministry is also full of hope.

Dr. David Chow, the president of Ambassador for Christ, will retire by November 2022, and Dr. Bor, the executive director, is also president-elect until May 2022. Both are close friends of the author. This author even introduced one mentee candidate to Dr. Bor, and that mentor-mentee relationship functioned well. The mentee said sometime their phone or online meetings lasted more than two hours, and this a good example of the goal of this thesis-project.

Four young Chinese Christians from China who converted to Christianity and started work in the Boston area agreed they will need mentors as spiritual parents, as their parents in China are not believers, and they will need guidance for their life and work. These students have

since graduated and started to work overseas. Chinese students agree that people from Taiwan and Hong Kong have little understanding of Mainland China.

In his presentations to churches and other groups, the author has described the differences between senior Chinese Christians and younger generations (see figure 1).



Figure 1. Similarities and Differences Among Chinese After Forty Years

A Revised Questionnaire and Responses to It

In revising the survey for this thesis-project, the author (again in consultation with his advisor) adjusted the order of questions, with the more difficult questions being placed in the middle. The questionnaire was meant to find out about demands and needs, as well as to define the qualifications of mentors, website platform building, and development of mentor training courses. Three churches were willing to distribute the questionnaire and receive the responses. The cover letter and the questionnaire are in appendix A.

Forty-three people responded to the questionnaire. Of those surveyed, the responses of sixteen of twenty-one men and twenty-one of twenty-two women were effective. The overall results from those thirty-seven people are summarized in appendix B; responses to each question are recorded in tabular form and included in appendix C.

Demographic Information

Although the questions about demographics were at the end of the questionnaire, they are here recorded first, to give readers an understanding of the group surveyed.

Many of the respondents (70.26 percent) are under forty years old. The oldest person is age 81. Among men, the average age is 42.56 years, and for women, it is 33.19 years. The educational level of this group is very high: the total of master's degrees and doctoral degrees is 86.48 percent. Near half of the respondents have lived in the United States for more than ten years.

Many of the respondents have been baptized for one to twenty years (81 percent), and 18.9 percent have been baptized for twenty-one to forty or more years. More than 60 percent of the participants are or have been in church-related occupations: four pastors, four elders, five ministers, and ten MDiv students. All elders also worked in different occupations. The MDiv students are all from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary.

The thirty-seven participants came from twenty-one different provinces, cities, or countries (see figure 2; also table 7).



Figure 2. Map of Chinese Provinces and Cities

Northeast: north from the Great Wall; North: between the Great Wall and the Yellow River; Central/West: between the Yellow River and the Yanez River; East: coastal provinces; South: from the Yanez River south; Abroad: from other countries

Source: www.travelchinaguide.com/map/china_map.htm

Analysis of the Questionnaire

Questions 1 through 7 ask respondents about their general knowledge of China and current policies there. For replies to questions 1 through 7, the choices are 1 = no knowledge or understanding, 2 = some knowledge but little understanding, 3 = some knowledge and some understanding, 4 = much knowledge and some understanding, 5 = much knowledge and much understanding.

Question 1. How well do you understand the fourteenth Chinese Five-Year-Plan (covering 2021–2025)?

Those with no knowledge or understanding are 48.65 percent, those with some knowledge but little understanding are 43.24 percent, for a total of 92.89 percent (table 8).

Question 2. How well do you understand the National Congress of the Communist Party of China?

Those with no knowledge or understanding are 21.62 percent; those with some knowledge but little understanding are 29.71 percent; more than half of the respondents, or 51.33 percent, are in this category (table 9). This means half of them are not really concerned about the operation of the government.

Question 3. How well do you understand the differences between three-self churches?

Of the respondents, 27.03 percent had some knowledge and some understanding; 29.71 percent, much knowledge, and some understanding; 24.32 percent, much knowledge and much understanding, for a total of 81.06 percent (table 10). This response indicates awareness of issues regarding Chinese local churches.

Question 4. How well do you understand the current religious regulations in China (especially as they apply to the practice of Christianity)?

The responses to this question were overall high: some knowledge and some understanding (29.71 percent); much knowledge and some understanding (21.62 percent); and

much knowledge and much understanding (16.22 percent), for a total of 67.55 percent (table 11). Christians are heavily influenced by the policy of the government.

Question 5. How well do you understand the current situation regarding restrictions on Christian evangelical mission activities on Chinese university campuses (2019)?

The responses to this question also showed high awareness: some knowledge and some understanding (32.43 percent); much knowledge and some understanding (24.31 percent); much knowledge and much understanding (18.92 percent), for a total of 75.66 percent (table 12). The restrictions on Chinese Christians were not new, and in world history restrictions have been imposed in many times and places, But God is King of Kings and Lord of lords.

Question 6. How well do you understand the challenges faced by Chinese Christian returnees (converted as Christians while they studied overseas)?

Those with some knowledge and some understandings were 29.71 percent, while those with much knowledge and some understandings were 27.03 percent, and those with much knowledge and much understanding were 13.51 percent, or a total of 70.25 percent (table 13). These responses again indicate an awareness of the issues.

Question 7. How well do you understand the current crackdown on Chinese house churches?

The responses to the question indicate a high level of knowledge: some knowledge and some understanding (35.12 percent), much knowledge and some understanding (18.92 percent), or much knowledge and much understanding (27.03 percent), for a total of 81.07 percent (table 14). There must be a reason why these things happened: What is the purpose of the Lord?

Questions 8 through 10 ask respondents about the proposed training program. For each of the following statements, the choices are 1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I slightly disagree, 3 = I neither agree nor disagree, 4 = I slightly agree, 5 = I strongly agree.

Question 8. For the huge number of students, there is an urgent need for Chinese Christian seniors (CCS) to be mentors or trainers of the current overseas Christian students (OCCS).

Most respondents were at a minimum neutral (18.92 percent) or expressed degrees of agreement (slightly agree, 24.32 percent; strongly agree, 51.35 percent), for a total of 75.67 percent (table 15). The “Train the Trainer” or mentee-mentor discipleship style should be encouraged in current and future mission development.

Question 9. Chinese Christians seniors (CCS) are well equipped to mentor, train, or disciple for the OCCS.

The percentage of neutral responses to question 9 (29.72 percent) was higher than for question 8. However, 21.62 percent agreed slightly, and the same percentage (21.62 percent) agreed strongly, for a total of 43.24 percent (table 16). Fewer than half of the survey participants fully understood the value and importance of Christian mentorship.

Question 10. Chinese Christians seniors (CCS) are willing “to walk out of their comfort zones” to serve the OCCS.

The percentages of those who disagreed slightly (16.2 percent) were higher for this question; those who were neutral accounted for 29.7 percent. Those who expressed slight agreement (40.5 percent) or strong agreement (10.81 percent) totaled 51.31 percent (table 17). It

is human nature to remain in one's comfort zone, and physical strength wanes with aging, but the calling from God will be left at the foot of seniors.

Questions 11 and 12 called for the most personal responses and therefore were included before the factual demographic questions. The responses to questions 11 and 12 were 1 = never, 2 = rarely (less than 1 time per month), 3 = sometimes (between 1 and 2 times per month, 4=often (between 2 and 3 times per month), 5 = regularly (1 time per week).

Question 11. On average, over the past 20 years, how often have you shared in Sunday school or a sermon?

Those who rarely participated in Sunday school or sermons accounted for 24.32 percent of those responding, those who participated sometimes were 16.22 percent of the respondents. Those who participated often (18.92 percent) or regularly (40.54 percent) totaled 59.46 percent (table 18).

Question 12. On average, over the past twenty years, how often have you attended Bible study meetings?

No respondents participated never or rarely. Those who participated sometimes totaled 5.41 percent. Those who participated often (18.92 percent) or regularly (75.68 percent) accounted for a total of 94.6 percent (table 19). These results indicate the participants understand the importance of mission and the mentee-mentor disciple training process.

Interviews

The thirty-three people who responded to the questionnaire agreed to be interviewed by the author. These interviews took place via Zoom and were recorded; this audio information has been translated from Chinese into English (see appendix D). A representative sampling of responses is included in this section.

Concerns of Current Overseas Chinese Students

The number of Chinese overseas students in the United States alone is 369,548.² Before the Covid-19 pandemic, North America Chinese churches or campus Bible study groups did evangelical mission, and they estimated 10 percent of the students might possibly converted as Christians; of those, more than 80 percent will go back to China. Among those converted young Christians will be candidates (potential mentees) to be trained as future Chinese Christian leaders. However, studies from many Christian originations through the years show that the retention rate is low, for as many as 80 percent of them are not attending any church after they return to China. How and why has this happened? What will be the root causes? Are there any actions that should be taken to improve this? The number of enrolled students from China in North America has dropped, the relationship between China and the United States currently is not sound, and students are getting younger, which means many high school students are coming in. Therefore, what strategy should we take?³

2. “International Students in USA (by the facts & figures, 2022), accessed April 28, 2020, admissionsly.com.

3. Participant M3-3, interview with the author, August 16, 2021; participant W4-1, interview with the author, August 26, 2021. The alphanumeric designations in these footnotes are the same as those used in appendix D.

Participants said cross-cultural training courses should be conducted before students come to North America and before they are scheduled to go back to China. Multilevel preparation could minimize the cultural shock and set a soft landing on both ends of the moves.⁴

Campus Bible study groups, church youth groups and Sunday schools, fellowships, cell groups, and all training meetings should individually take care of each person. These groups are where mentee-mentor relationship can be started, for the faith growth of each person will be a serious investment. Zoom meetings will need to be broadly used. When students first arrive in the North America, they will need support and help in the challenges of adjusting to a different culture, especially in their daily lives. This is a critical moment for outreach and for making friend while people are in need. There may be less emphasis today on financial support, but support will be needed with school courses and class learning-related requirements; homework, such as writing reports (e.g., helping to correct grammar); and speaking and listening to the language. These skills will need to be enhanced. But many Chinese churches are interested in an increased number of congregations or receiving more monetary offerings, rather than wining souls. This phenomenon is widespread among churches, and it must forbid, Churches should confess their faults in this matter.⁵

The returnees' faith foundation is not firm enough, said several participants, and this may be the root causes of returnees' problems. Also, ministry to returnees is not a priority of many

4. Participant M9-2, interview with the author, August 27, 2021; participant M6-6, interview with the author, August 21, 2021.

5. Participant W4-2, 3, interview with the author, August 26, 2021; participant W5-1, 2, interview with the author, August 27, 2021.

Chinese churches. If there are no efforts to plant seeds, can the farmer expect a good harvest? The current results require the workers to repent.⁶

The challenges, difficulties, and problems of returnees stem from internal and external pressures. Often returnees are around thirty years old. Many of them have just started a new family, but Chinese family and social expectations will bring many extra pressures. In China, competition for jobs is very serious, and the competition within a company will keep people working extra hours. Family (parents, parents-in-law, even grandparents), other relatives, and former classmates watch one's performance. They were proud of students when they first went to foreign countries to study; now that they have gained a degree and have returned, family and friends have high expectations. In addition, since the one-child policy of China started in the 1980s, a high percentage of this group of people were the only child in the family. When the young adults have their own child, the family pressure intensifies, for often both husband and wife are working. There are time constraints, and physical strength is a limited resource, so the expectations will be too heavy for the returnees to carry. The stresses and strains could easily break a person down; there will be plenty of things to be done during the weekend, and one may have no time or desire to go to church or fellowships. Very soon the Christian returnees will be isolated, without enough friends or other supportive people to talk to. Better planning for connections will be help to prevent those things from happening; a reliable platform of connections will be needed.⁷

6. Participant M2-1, 3, 6, interview with the author, July 16, 2021; participant M4-2, interview with the author, August 19, 2021; participant M6-1, interview with the author, August 21, 2021; participant M11, interview with the author, September 21, 2021; participant W9-3, interview with the author, September 22, 2021.

7. Participant M9-3, interview with the author, August 27, 2021; participant M13, interview with the author, September 27, 2021; participant W1-1, interview with the author, September 29, 2021; participant W3-1, interview with author, August 24, 2021; participant W13, interview with the author, September 25, 2021.

Concerns of Mentor Candidates

Mentor qualifications

Chinese senior Christians should seek God's plan for his kingdom and God's servant individually. These persons need to follow God's footsteps closely and walk together with God every day and all day. The examples of Jesus, Moses, and the apostle Paul set a pattern (see chapter 2). Likewise, in graduate school a PhD student will be guided by the supervisor, and this is a good example of mentoring. Moreover, everything people learn has been learned from someone else: for example, the carpenter, the auto mechanic, athletes.

For senior Christian mentors (age fifty-five or beyond) in this project, it is suggested that the qualifications will be at least: a reborn Christian, baptized for more than ten years; has read through the whole Bible at least five times; has conducted and led Bible study for five years, whether in church Sunday school, a cell group, or a Chinese campus Bible study group. It will be good if mentors have taken theological courses, have attended church regularly, and have been involved all kinds of church services. Also, they should have a sound reputation in the workplace and performed well in his or her professional life, with a higher education level. They should have sound family relationships and have lived in North America more than ten years and be fluent in Chinese and English.⁸

Building the mentor-mentee relationship

A mentor as a coach, advisor, or supervisor is one who has mastered the area in which the mentee wishes to learn from him or her. The process of finding a mentor can be passive and

8. Participant M4-4, interview with the author, August 19, 2021; participant M6-3,4, 5, interview with the author, August 21, 2021; participant M16-3, interview with the author, August 17, 2021; participant W2-1, interview with the author, August 18, 2021; participant W9-2, 4, interview with the author, September 22, 2021; participant W7-2, interview with the author, September 2, 2021; participant W8, interview with the mentor, September 21, 2021.

active role. For example, West Point Academy assigns mentors through a six-step match-meet process; a sports coach may be assigned or selected by the top coaches; and an individual or a family may choose a music teacher.

Facilitating a Christian mentor-mentee relationship may be done by many ways and steps to ensure the match encourages healthy and fruitful goals. For senior mentors, background from Mainland China or from other regions (e.g., Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore) is suitable for different mentees. For concerns relating to the Chinese government, seniors from Mainland China will consider the needs of their relatives who are still in Mainland China. Therefore, it will be good to take care of current students in North America and build a long-term relationship, for they are familiar with the Chinese government style. Seniors from other regions will need to receive training to understand China, for there was little knowledge for them in the past, and the social values were different; however, there are still advantages are their mutuality of many ways.⁹ For example, one mentor was a general manager of a large, Taiwan-based company in Boston and the deputy dean of the China Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan. He conducted training in various places in Mainland China for many years.¹⁰ He reflects on being a mentor.

In my opinion, these mentors are ones who preferably came to the US as students, got baptized, became Christian, and have served in the church. This type of mentor I think would have an easier way to make connection with the students. Take myself as an example. I came from Taiwan; all I knew are the methods that I grew up with. This type of thinking is much different even comparing it with the American culture, much different from the cultural background of Chinese students. For example, back in Kaohsiung, there was a fellowship for the graduated young professionals. At that time, there were very few fellowships for this age group. So, at that time, that's why it was easy to gather these members. What I mean is that in our current time, the people are

9. Participant M1-2, interview with the author, July 7, 2021; participant M3-4, interview with the author, August 16, 2021; participant M4-5, interview with the author, August 19, 2021; participant M5-6, interview with the author, August 20, 2021; participant M7-1, 3, interview with the author, August 24, 2021; participant M9-4, 5, interview with the author, August 27, 2021; participant W1-2, interview with the author, September 29, 2021; participant W10-1, interview with the author, September 24, 2021.

10. Participant M7-3, 5, interview with the author, August 24, 2021; he is a church elder, age 81, and a faithful servant of the Lord. His comments have been lightly edited for clarity and continuity.

much different; in terms of being a mentor or mentee it's all different. For example, brother S., who came from China and has solid foundation in the faith, can be very suitable as a mentor candidate. So, I feel this type of example is much better suited.

He continues by giving two examples of strategy for the mission.

My situation is this: among strangers, you need some type of relationship or introduction first. Let me give you two examples since these are younger people. These two have great accomplishment in their profession. One attends an American church; this person has a difficult time to reconcile what was taught in one church versus how church is conducted. As you know, church culture varies quite a bit. This person mainly has difficulties facing what he/she perceives the Bible teaches but then the church conducts [itself] differently, so then this person was getting ready to leave church. The first counseling session we had, I just listened to what this person said. After listening I gave some possibilities and slowly gained depth of understanding. Previously this person couldn't find answers from several sources, but after this person came to me, we have become good friends.

Another example was in China, while I was conducting teaching. This student heard my lesson and came to speak to me. This student was one who left his home church to establish [his] own church. There are quite a number of these instances in China. After the lesson this person [sought] me out to ask me if I can be his mentor. I said of course. We started once a month, and he went over all the questions that he had and whether there are books he can read to learn from. We communicated for a while. The church that he started from one location grew to eight locations. Previously we communicated more regularly, but right now we stay in touch. The growth of his church is much more in a spirit of unity than many other churches. So, this was a good success example. These were my experiences. So, one was just a single person, then the other is to become a leader of a church.

But most important is still the introduction phase. The example of the single person had already known I had this type of counseling, but we just didn't have opportunity to discuss deeper. So, then this person found me. The other heard my lesson in a classroom. So, therefore I believe it's a natural connection where even before we talk, we had some sort of a connection, some sort of friendship.

If there was not a prelude to the relationship, then it might be difficult for strangers to meet up and establish a mentor-mentee relationship. The starting point is very important.

It's regarded as a church in the city. The churches in the villages are more difficult to get involved, since they do not have a complete theological training system. They tend to train up their own and not feel the need to consult outside sources. I can give you an example: they came to my training classes, and it was composed of leaders from a few churches that came together. When they heard my class, they responded with agreement and I wanted to teach them to establish a center for theological training, kind of like a central kitchen for all their franchise stores. So, in this center is where there will be trained pastoral staff, those who do counseling or other ministries, that these ministries can support all the surrounding churches. They think it's [possible to do], the local leaders wanted to do it, so I led the leader's step by step to accomplish it. In the process, toward the end, we encountered an elderly sister who was the original founder. They

wanted to follow the Bible word for word, as “women are not supposed to be leaders,” so I suggested that we can give the title of Head Deacon to her, but they responded that there’s no such term in the Bible. Due to this position title issue, it took two years. So, you can see in different areas there are different tripping stones.

Yes, [it is] important to have introductions in place first, then send the personnel. If you were to do it without prior relationship it might be difficult.

He also commented about training via Zoom.

And so, there is a church where for three months, every Friday I was able to conduct training via Zoom. And the leaders who paid attention really were appreciative, as much of the information is what they have not heard. But for them, to carry out the training that they learned may be difficult since the congregants vary quite a bit—some are very charismatic, while others have firm beliefs in one denomination. These types of issues are difficult to solve over online formats. There is immediate familiarity and liking when we meet physically, but [in the] online format, even though they respect me, for them to go out and unify their church there’s difficulty. These are issues and difficulties that surface as churches try to expand.

I don’t have solutions for that, but often if we meet up in person, it seems to be easier to come up a solution.

I must let you know that I’m past eighty years old, so slowly may not be suitable to be in the field, as my sight and strength may be waning. So, I just reduce my serving capacity and do as much as I can. So, this is my current condition. So, there’s not too much I can help you with.¹¹

The Environment within China

Chinese Christian house churches

The local Chinese Christian house churches are separate from the three-self Christian churches. The three-self Christian churches were registered by the government religious bureau during the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In several countryside areas, the house churches developed as an environment in which secret meetings were held. But the number of congregations was huge, for Chinese Communist Party members are atheist. The requirements of registration include the control of financial management, even the monitoring of the content of the sermon, as well as something the pastors must announce in the services. The license of a

11. Participant M7-3, 5, interview.

pastor to preach will need to receive the government bureau's approval. For fear that outside money will influence the people to against the government, and the sermon content will not include opinion against the government, the process of control was in place. From 1978 to 2017, the monitoring of House Christian Churches in the cities was much less than from 2017 to 2022. In 2022, the local governments started to break down the red crosses from the top of church buildings, and religious restrictions were tightened. For example, since March 1, 2022, all websites will not allow religious activities, even the selling of Bibles or downloads of the Bible from the websites. Conduct a Zoom meetings of Bible study is not allowed. The style of the local house churches is different from that of other countries, and it looks much centralized. The pastors or elders have strong power, and the focus of sermon topics is more on Bible observation and inspiration, and less on application. The atmosphere for mentoring is there, but people are afraid to share personal things, because during the Cultural Revolution, people were asked to monitor each other.¹²

Difficulties for returnees to adapt to Chinese house churches

For returnees, it will be difficult to adapt and adjust in a short time. The environment of foreign countries' churches is more of community-style fellowship, which includes more caring, emphasis on loving each other, and helping and supporting each other. Therefore, returnees to China could feel isolated in the Chinese house churches. If the returnees lack a firm foundation, then quickly they will stop attending church. Given the time constraints and stress of working, the better way is to involve them in a cell group quickly, so they get to know new friends and build new relationships.

12. Participant M1-1, 3, interview with the author, July 7, 2021; participant M2-2, 5, 7, 8, interview with the author, July 16, 2021; participant M3-1, 2, interview with the author, August 16, 2021; participant M4-1, 3, interview with the author, August 19, 2021.

Children's Sunday school is a priority of returnees as parents, but the government regulations do not allow attendance in a church for people under eighteen, which means there will be no children's Sunday school. Then what will young parents do, when they had planned to attend the church services? One of the best ways is to arrange for several children of similar ages to gather with one family, and those parents will take turns as Sunday school teachers. And it is important to build connection before students to go to foreign countries to study, and the arrangement for connections also applies before they go back to China. Several platforms have been built, but there will be limitations, and people must be very careful of the monitoring cameras that are everywhere in China today. But different areas have different levels of constraints. It will depend on previous relationships with the local religious bureau. Some of the officers were Christians and already knew the congregation for a long time, which means they already knew the full process of a local gathering and have confidence in it.¹³

Chinese government religious policy

The main reasons for the China government's religious restrictions on Christians is not only because they are atheists (they call themselves atheists), but there are still many different temples of all religions in the cities and on the mountains. There is a fear that when believers gather, they might form a strong power against the government. Also, some money that entered in China for religion purposes can support activities to resist the government. If there is a protest march, the flags, signboards, or even the same garments, will cost money, and people are needed to organize the event. The Chinese Communist Party excelled at this kind of protest and is

13. Participant M5-1, 2, 3, 4, interview with the author, August 20, 2021; participant M9-1, interview with the author, August 27, 2021; participant M16-1, 2, interview with the author, August 17, 2021; participant W6-1, 2, interview with the author, August 31, 2021; participant W10-3, 4, interview with the author, September 24, 2021; participant WL13-2, interview with the author, September 25, 2021; participant W14, interview with the author, September 25, 2021.

deeply familiar those ways of revolution. From the observation of the rest of the world, it is an effective way to express opposing ideas.

With the recent development of new communication tools, it is easier to inform protestors about the time and place of gatherings, and the news of failures can spread quickly and broadly. From what was learned from Edward Snowden, the whistleblower about American surveillance programs, we know countries are spying each other every moment. Maybe therefore the Chinese government blocked worldwide web services; Google, Yahoo and WeChat etc. are not functional in China today.¹⁴

Effects of the Covid-19 pandemic

Since late 2019, the lifestyle of all human being has been changed. Church life and Christian activities have changed. To work and study at home is normal. Websites have been broadly used, mass gathering is limited, and physical distance between persons person is required. Christians will need to find a new way to do evangelical mission. The mission is the same, and everything has its own time. What Christians need to seek is God's wisdom and God's way and time of doing the tasks. Still, there are many new ways Christians can demonstrate the reborn life and live for Jesus.¹⁵

The Six-Course Training Seminar

This training seminar was held remotely because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Ten people participated in a trial training session of six courses. The course content is detailed in appendix

14. Participant M1-3, interview with the author, July 7, 2021; participant M5-3, interview with the author, August 20, 2021; participant M6-2, interview with the author, August 21, 2021.

15. Participant M5-5, interview with the author, August 20, 2021; participant W10, interview with the author, September 24, 2021; participant W16, interview with the author, October 1, 2021.

E. Nine people provided feedback in the requested time frame, either by email (eight people) or by phone (one person).

Responses are indicated by a number: 1, the course was no help; 2, the course was of little help; 3, the course was of some help; 4, the course was of much help; 5, the course was very good.

The results show the course rankings, which are between 4 (meaning they were of much help) and 5 (very good). The breakdown for individual courses is as follows: course 1, $45/9 = 5$; course 2, $42/9 = 4.7$; course 3, $44/9 = 4.9$; course 4, $42/9 = 4.7$; course 5, $41/9 = 4.6$; and course 6, $40/9 = 4.5$. See table 20 for a tabulation of the results.

In chapter 5, the author will offer recommendations based on the information gathered from the questionnaire and interviews.

CHAPTER 5

OUTCOMES

This chapter gathers insights the author has learned from responses to the questionnaire and the interviews. The interviews with thirty-three Christians in the Boston area encompass their responses to the questionnaires and the material in the six training courses.

Responses from the Interviews

Insights about Christian Returnees

Returnees are Chinese Christian students who studied in foreign countries and returned to China. Their current ages will be around twenty-eight to forty-five. Many have started a new family and a new job; new challenges bring great pressure.

Addressing the low retention rate of Christians who return to China, Participant M1 said,

Mostly, Christian returnees need to find a suitable local church. The returnees need people/ministry to help them to get accustomed to Mainland China local churches. Because ways of conducting church are very different, also less old/senior members can care for those returnees. The returnees need to fellowship with those in their age group, but it's a bit difficult. Those who accepted Jesus abroad didn't really build a solid foundation in faith before their return. So, (1) the local churches need to continue to guide returnees in their faith, (2) build mechanisms between Chinese local churches and overseas Christian churches for the returnees on effective ways of communication.¹

Regarding ministry to returnees,

Some ministries that focus on returnees are not of an ideal situation. For those ministries work as fellowship style, so that the returnees would not attend church and they will struggle with the shifting pastoring ways/methods. When churches conduct interviews with returnees to help and link them up to a local church, usually the church elder or pastor or deacons will ask them about their faith background and church attendance habits. And [those leaders] would introduce to [them] churches where there are younger members, so the leaders/pastors there can better understand and help them. The returnees

1. Participant M1, interview with the author, July 7, 2021. The interview responses in this chapter have been lightly edited for clarity and continuity.

need to immerse into local churches, not ask the local churches to change/modify to be agreeable to the returnees.²

This person further observed,

How do we help the returnees to be localized? This may be a painful process for the returnees. Especially for those returning from North America, the pressure of life is completely different. In North America, they have a lot of resources to invest in caring ministries, especially for new believers but also for seekers. Whenever these people ask for help, the churches in America would do what they can to help. But in China, this is not possible. So, some would think the local churches in China lack love. But the returnee's expectations toward the churches in China are not very realistic. The difference in expectations creates misunderstanding. Also, in terms of spiritual nourishment (sermons) in North America usually there are many layers of understanding, the new believer in North American can get something from the sermon, but more so in feeling the care, even though the new and young attendants may not have the opportunity to be exposed to deeper biblical teachings.³

Expanding on a point made by another respondent, Participant M2 noted differing pastoral styles in local and foreign churches:

In North America, most Chinese churches, the leaders and pastors can take Bible truths and apply for daily lives. But within China, many sermons are more doctrinal and focus on the accuracy of the truth, not on application. So, the differences in methods can also create a separation, where the returnees feel not being fed, while the local leaders feel that the returnees are not willing to seek wisdom. So, both sides have room to be more accommodative; the method to the returnees seems to be overly logical, maybe overly theological.⁴

Yet, says one participant, clear theological understanding and being reborn help returnees:

The first thing is to make sure that they're "reborn," that they really understand the meaning of salvation. Because many in the church don't really have that understanding. Those returnees who are/were members, the loss rate is quite low, once they return to China. Facing differences in cultures and styles of worship, it still boils down to individuals' lives; that's the root, whether they have a firm foundation. There must be the Word, there must be the gospel preached. That their hearts really were pierced by the gospel. Their lives must have been changed by the gospel, with understanding of eternal salvation, eternal death, a clear understanding. Returnees who have a solid foundation

2. Participant M2, interview with the author, July 16, 2021.

3. Participant M2, interview.

4. Participant M2, interview.

seek out churches when they return to China. Many returnees veer away not due to outward physical circumstance; really is rooted in his/her life.⁵

Thus, a returnee's church life has an important role in one's adjustment to Chinese churches.

The regards what is a church, why you need to submit to a physically meeting church, some may have very vague understanding. So, when they return, if their previous submission to a local church was based more on bonding with other brothers and sisters, or church activities, then once they return, of course all these things are absent in China. Then the returnee is faced with the challenge to be accustomed with a new group of people who are quite different in many ways. Even the teachings can be different, style differences, these things result in them not to be willing to submit to a local church in China. But on the flip side, the reborn believers will continue to search out a church. That will a bit more difficult, so indeed some will be lost from this.⁶

To prepare for believers' return to China and to ease their transition, Participant M6 offered suggestions.

The preparation must be done while the returnees are still in the US churches, prior to their departure. Because (1) they really understand salvation, and (2) they need to clearly understand the meaning and importance of church life. It's more of a growth process of spiritual life. And (3), surely there can be accompanying help ministry that would provide counseling, introduction to churches, maybe cooperation from churches both in the US and China. There can be these types of ministries to aid in the transition. I see these points can be actionable right now.

Some returnees that attended a previous fellowship will stay in contact for a couple of years. But afterwards, they have found a local church to attend; these are the best instances showing that they have transitioned well. Others are not willing to find local churches; they would rather stay in contact with previous fellowship, maybe through one-on-one communication. The reasons for these not willing to find local churches may be due to (1) governmental religious restrictions or (2) work or other circumstances—they don't want to make trouble. (3) Some others are not able to get accustomed to the culture of the local church in China, perhaps due to age or worship style differences. At first, make time to stay connected, but once it became busy then the frequency of communication lessened over time.⁷

This participant further commented about returnees' faith and church life:

5. Participant M4, interview with the author, August 19, 2021.

6. Participant M5, interview with the author, August 20, 2021.

7. Participant M6, interview with the author, August 21, 2021.

Many returnees would be more at ease with the fellowship environment in the US. They may not be very regular in attending even in this environment. It's much more difficult for them to transition to a totally different environment once return to China. The most important factor is whether they have a thirst and hungry heart for God. If they have that, no matter where they end up, they will find some way to keep on devotional studies, and after transition back to China, they will slowly go find churches on their own. They may find that the church in China is much different, but they would find their place to serve within a local church and become a family member of a local church. This part is really led by God, not necessarily something we can impose. They need to establish a habit of regular devotion.

One possibility would be to have the returnees able to serve in the church in some capacity prior to their departure. So that they would understand that once they're baptized, they would carry certain responsibility for this church family. Not just come to listen to Sunday messages and nothing else. So, once they return, they would remember that they have some experience in serving in the church. That they would feel they're a necessary functioning part of a church. Not only an audience, but also a contributor, a wall, a brick, a column. With a perspective of being one church of Christ, there are no walls between churches, but each believer needs to play an active part being an element of the church. Also being in a group, the importance of caring for one another, praying for one another, studying the Bible together that can show someone who is more stable within a church. Adding to personal devotional time, and following up after their return, the part where they have served in church while in the US will help them to get motivated that they can continue to work for God once they return.⁸

Another way to ease the transition, said another respondent, is that

it's better not to label oneself as a "returnee." No matter where you were in the world, when you return to China, you should join a local church in China. . . . I don't think this label should be used at all in the first place. When you return to China, you are Chinese, you should be actively involved with a church nearby, not feeling a sense of superiority because [of] one's learning outside the country. When one returns, one should earnestly join the local church and be able to contribute what one has learned outside of China into the local church. One should not wait around for someone to pastor you. Those that return should not be passive. You should be active, as the apostle Paul said: to forget things of the past and set my eyes on the prize, run toward it. If you're a serious Christian you should know where your prize/goal is, instead of waiting around. Ones that return should be actively finding ways to equip oneself and to serve others.⁹

Further,

If the family of the returnee is not Christian, then it is very difficult. Certainly, the churches in China will find and connect them with other churches in China, but it's very difficult to maintain church life for the returnees. If the parents of the returnee are

8. Participant M6, interview.

9. Participant W3, interview with the author, August 24, 2021.

Christians, it seems that they would tend to leave their hometowns in search for better jobs. . . . It seems those returnees who have a Christian background focus on outward lifestyle more than their faith life and that their attitudes are much different compared with when they were still in China versus when they return. Basically, they can find good work, and [that] tends to be something that they like. Some I have seen had employment in the US, then returned to China and liked the work in China. Previously they focused more on faith, maybe also due to a simpler lifestyle. Before they studied abroad the topic of conversation is different compared with after they return. [There is] more focus on current trends, focus on their pursuits, overall, the focus tends to shift toward worldly things.¹⁰

Seniors as Mentors

The seniors in this study are overseas Chinese Christians, age fifty-five and over. They are reborn Christians, obey the Great Commandment and the Great Commission, love God and younger generations, and have a sound understanding of China.

One participant cautioned,

Senior Christians with Hong Kong/Taiwan backgrounds have strong opinions on politics. At the very least they need to understand each other and accept reality from the other's point of view. Especially those younger Chinese students, they don't particularly dislike the Chinese government, and some may even be in supportive of the Chinese government. If the senior Christians have strong opposing views toward the Chinese government, then it's difficult to establish a relationship between the Chinese students and the senior Christians from Hong Kong/Taiwan.¹¹

Amplifying on this point, another interviewee said,

These people who were abroad many years don't understand the conditions in current China. What the returnees are facing may not be understood or felt by the mentors. The mentors' counsel and advice were according to experiences here in foreign countries, but to the returnee it's not helpful, especially when an actual challenge occurred. Another issue is that the remote contact means being far apart. The bonding between the two parties is probably weaker, through phone or email (Zoom, WeChat). . . . What returnees need is accompanying and fellowship. Mentorship is not someone trying to teach something to them, especially younger generations.¹²

10. Participant W3, interview.

11. Participant M1, interview.

12. Participant M4, interview.

Building Fellowship and Faith

Building fellowship before establishing a mentor-mentee relationship would enhance the transition for returnees, one participant advised:

The distance is an issue. But that can still be tried. The better way is that the mentors in the foreign countries would build relationships with students while they are still in foreign countries. Without a connection that's started in foreign countries, then it's even more difficult once they return to China to attempt to start a connection. So instead of trying to help remotely, it's better to concentrate the efforts while they are here. In this way, once the student does return, then it's more likely that the mentor and the returnee would continue their connection.¹³

However, another senior Christian commented the building faith and recognizing different pastoral styles are as important as follow-up by mentors:

The reason for the returnees not able to keep the faith is not necessarily that there's no one to follow up. But one main reason is that while they were abroad, the foundation of faith was not implemented in them. The two ways that the foundation of faith was not built. One is that they didn't take time to learn who God is and how God is like, so this type of student has no root. Along with no one to follow up, it's very easy for this type of student to veer away. The second type is that the way that the student has been pastored in the US is much different from the way they pastor in China. Some churches in the US may focus on the positive side where it focuses on the benefits of believing, where if you believe then you're blessed in all you do, so they have no concept of carrying the cross of Christ, in terms of paying a price. So, when they return to China, in home churches it's mainly about sacrificing, so that leads the returnees not willing to attend those churches in China.¹⁴

Equipping Seniors to Mentor

The interview participants had perceptive thoughts about the training of mentors, as evidenced by the following comments:

These seniors as counselors need to be equipped, some training, and have time, that their kids have grown, so that they really would have time to care for these students. Nowadays, it's not only simply treating the students to a meal, but you also really must share from the heart, and time commitment. The relationship needs to be established upon trust to a point where when the student encounters a problem, they would feel

13. Participant M4, interview.

14. Participant M6, interview.

comfortable to come to the counselor/mentor, and this would be the time when the gospel can really have an effect.¹⁵

It is important to know that these students, no matter if they came earlier in high school age, or college age, their culture is still much connected with China through the WeChat platform. Much of the media content is transmitted through that platform, which shapes their views and culture. So, those mentors/counselors must have a listening heart, especially those who have been in the US for twenty years; they don't understand that culture; these senior mentors with a Taiwanese background will need a lot of mental adjustment with a soft heart. [They] cannot preach to the students as a know-it-all. One must first listen, and it is a good sign if the students are even willing to talk. The cultural differences between the two groups can still be great. Taiwanese may want to chat about politics, but those from China don't focus much on politics, but more on actual daily life needs. Many Taiwanese hold on to the ideal of keeping democracy, but those from China don't pay much attention to politics. So, to be Christ-centered, knowing that no matter where you're from there are differences, knowing that can prevent [mentors] from talking too much about what one knows. When a student hears that you know it all, they tend to disregard you later. It is important to have training for these mentors from a cultural perspective.¹⁶

Most of the time we would stay/focus only on what we know or studying the Bible from our perspective and ask questions. Especially most students that come over are here for a master's or PhD degree. The mentors need to have certain training or even post-graduate degree to maintain posture; otherwise, it is likely the students would challenge a mentor's authority. So, it is important to have solid training in different aspects of life and faith. More importantly it's important to be able to have actual contact in daily life with the students. That resulted in not knowing what the students think about and not knowing their needs, how to realistically help them. So sufficient training is important, also need to spend time with them, and at the same time maintain one's own life, all in all this work can be challenging.¹⁷

On being asked what it means for a mentor to be well equipped, this participant said,

There are a lot of resources such as Sunday school classes and different training seminars. The key will be whether the mentor candidate sees this need being necessary to be fulfilled. Among those have been baptized, maybe it's necessary for us to bring forth this idea and need to them. . . . Many may have the idea that it's only [those] who are "leaders" to do this work of mentoring. God has called each believer to help spread the gospel. When we preach the gospel, it's important to impart the ideal that all believers can work the work of the Lord, not just leaders or pastors.¹⁸

15. Participant M6, interview.

16. Participant M6, interview.

17. Participant M6, interview.

18. Participant M6, interview.

Making Connections and Understanding Cultural Differences

One participant commented extensively on cultural differences affecting the connection between those who seek mentoring and potential mentors.

Usually, those who need the counseling . . . come and find senior mentors, that's how it starts for most of the cases. So, many seniors don't know how to [reach out to] those who need counseling. These mentors are ones who preferably came to the US as students, got baptized, became Christians, and have served in the church. This type of mentor I think would have an easier [task] to make connection with the students. People who came from Taiwan all knew the methods that [they] grew up with. This type of thinking is much different even comparing it with American culture. It is much different from the cultural background of Chinese students. In our current time, people are much different in terms of being a mentor or mentee. . . . People who came from China and have a solid foundation in the faith, they can be very suitable as a mentor candidate.

About the early student-led Bible studies comprised of mainly Hong Kong/Taiwanese students, there are no longer these types of groups. The members from these Bible studies would have a generational gap toward the Chinese students. Most important still is the introduction phase, it's a natural connection where even before we talk, we have some sort of a connection, some sort of friendship. A prelude to the relationship . . . it might be difficult for strangers to meet up and establish a mentor/mentee relationship. The starting point is very important.

Why [do] they need to be prepared as a cross-cultural missionary? One thing is that they must carry a sense of mission when students return, otherwise, without a sense of mission, one's life most likely [will] just drift around. Likewise, for a Chinese student to leave China, they should also carry a sense of mission to study abroad. Going abroad to study is not just to embellish oneself and come back with a good degree to get a good job with a label of being a "returnee." If this was the only reason for a Christian student to study abroad, then I feel it's pathetic. Going abroad is to widen your view, to carry a deeper heart for the kingdom of God, so that what you have learned through your studies can become something that help you share the gospel. If it's studying abroad, or returning, one must carry a sense of [being a] missionary.¹⁹

As another participant pointed out, cross-cultural matters may also affect senior mentors who came from Mainland China:

Many of the Chinese Christian seniors (CCS) who are from China arrived in the US in the 1980s and 1990s, so they're approaching the retirement age. A few are beginning to retire. This ministry would involve considerations of safety in a different political environment. Even these who are outside of China would also have concerns whether they may encounter troubles/hassles.²⁰

19. Participant M9, interview with the author, August 27, 2021.

20. Participant W1, interview with the author, September 29, 2021.

Concerns of the Senior Mentors

The respondents voiced several concerns that senior mentors may have. One person pointed out the differences in environment between the US and Mainland China, and that some senior Christians may not fully understand the gap:

The returnees need pastoring and care, and the mature Christians overseas can do some ministry. But one hesitancy regarding the suitability of connecting these two groups: the concern is that there's generation gap and living habits/environment. These mature Christians overseas probably don't understand the situation in China. Who would be best to pastor these returning students? The matching process adopted from the West Point Academy, then it's not just one on one. And how does the church play a role in the whole process? And how are the mentors selected? Do they have certain needed qualifications? Perhaps it requires more detailed plans as the research continues. "Senior" does not necessarily mean that they are mature in Christ. Their discipleship and their life conduct may not be exemplary or suitable. To coach and to disciple others needs a special heart and gift. [A mentor] really needs a pastoral heart. So, the equipping must reflect that. People would question how motivated retirees are to take care of the overseas students. There needs to be some training and motivation.²¹

Similar concerns were mentioned by two other participants:

As the counterpart is facing possible sudden changes/moves as well as experiencing emotional pressures where they still need to rely on financial support from family (as many thoughts by studying abroad one can find employment right away). When they're self-sustaining they don't even want to have contact with you. Following up [with] returnees is very difficult. Those Chinese Christian seniors that are still in the US are very suitable. The authors think more suitable candidates are those who came to the US (became a Christian), then later returned to China, and have lived in China for a long period of time, those can be good mentors. Because if one's in the US it's very difficult to understand the challenges in China, as the environment change is drastic.²²

[The mentoring relationship] will be end when the returners settled down and find a local church [where they] decide to be involved. Then the relationship will be distanced. It is very important for the other region Chinese to be a mentor to the mentee from Mainland China. Most of them seriously lack enough knowledge of current China and the house churches' situations.²³

21. Participant W2, interview with the author, August 18, 2021.

22. Participant W9, interview with the author, September 22, 2021.

23. Participant M16, interview with the author, August 17, 2021.

Strengths and Strategy

One participant had an optimistic view of the strengths that senior Christians bring to mentoring:

They're very well equipped in the Word, also with regards to the understanding of the truth. I also feel that they're well equipped as they often have communications with brothers and sisters in China. And when there are these foreign students coming to the US to study, they take time to care for them, they actively chat with these students to understand their situations. They have some sense and some knowledge about the churches in China and the surrounding conditions. Also, they're well versed in truth, so I feel the CCS are good candidates, if there is a course that would be beneficial, so I feel it depends on which portion of the CCS and how would they serve the returnees. Many elderly members of some house churches travel to [the] further countryside to spread the gospel. They become the main force/organizers of these outreaches. . . . There are even older brothers that would bring young brothers on short-term mission trips.²⁴

Another respondent identified a strategy for identifying who is qualified to mentor:

A kingdom-minded heart, and acceptance of the cross-cultural training resources, and to be able to inject a sense of mission to the various groups of returnees. Also, to send them, to bless them to return. Also, it's best, no matter if its students going abroad or students returning when they have finished their studies, both the churches in China and abroad should work very closely together. For a student, even before he/she goes abroad, a connection should be made to a local church and fellowship even before they depart from China. Likewise, for the returnee, the church abroad should have already made connections with a suitable church, fellowship, cell group, prior to his/her return. This would be the ideal situation. It is just as bad if we were to send a returnee back but didn't make the proper connection, while people stopped communicating with the returnee, and no one knows what happened to them. This becomes the large numbers of loss as we see today, loss of fish through a broken net. To establish a network of churches to a point that this net is dense enough so that the fish cannot easily be lost.²⁵

The Chinese Government and the New Religious Regulations and Restrictions

Government Influence and Christians

China adopted communist theory; therefore, atheism is accepted but also more significantly is required of all Chinese Communist Party (CCP) members. Although the Chinese

24. Participant W13, interview with the author, September 25, 2021.

25. Participant M9, interview.

constitution allows for religious belief, the CCP is afraid that foreign countries will use the churches as a channel to break down the Chinese government. The CCP fears that when people gather, they will form powerful opposition to the government; therefore, the CCP restricts the free local churches, and if the church is not registered by the government, it will be considered illegal.

A biblical view of government is a fundamental matter for Christians, as this respondent notes:

From the value system of the Bible, how to resolve the antagonism between China and the US? How to view the two governments? Does it have to result in one being just and the other being evil? Is there a way to understand the other side? Even though most would agree that in terms of societal structures the US is better, and maybe a little better in terms of Christian beliefs (religious rights), is that enough to conclude in absolute terms that the Chinese government is evil, and the US government is on the just side? Is there a way to find a resolution from a biblical perspective?²⁶

Other respondents commented about the view of the Chinese government in general, the new regulations, and how returnees might deal with those pressures. After the recent newly published government regulations about religious activities, there is more limitation on being able to work with students.

The latest announcement is that from March 1, 2022, no websites will allow any religious-related sharing of information. It appears the environment is not favorable overall. Regarding the house churches, during the celebration of the Chinese political party's one-hundred-year anniversary, many WeChat accounts were eliminated. This is quite serious, as many of these WeChat accounts had been established for many years and were one of the main ways for groups of believers to stay connected. There is now no place to purchase a Bible or to download it. If one wants a Bible, it must be purchased from a three-self church or a Catholic

26. Participant M1, interview.

church, and identification is required.²⁷ Participants commented about the ways these new regulations may affect believers and their responses to those regulations.

One aspect is mainly informational, such as about the governmental regulations within China, and how to find a church, perhaps through a network of connections to make introductions. The other aspect is to know about the habits/styles of the brothers and sisters that returnees will meet with. In addition, mentors in the foreign country still need to provide some company, to accompany them through. So not just training on knowledge, but when the returnee experience higher than normal pressures there is a need for the mentors to support them on site.²⁸

Some of those who returned to China are still willing to confess that they're Christians, while others will choose not to confess publicly but only privately, especially if there's political pressure. Most common is on certain official surveys, they will not be willing to list themselves as Christians. How to respond to these circumstances: it's not proper to push them currently; pray for them, but also find a way to encourage them.²⁹

The Chinese government is trying to control or understand the churches, because they believe that when people are gathering, they will form a kind of force or power, especially when they have the same belief. China experienced in Beijing a religion-like group called Falun Gong [which] formed a big gathering to show a kind of strike. Also, since 1840, and especially in 1900, Christianity entered by a kind of invasion force, and many churches were built up by different denominations from different countries. The missionaries in the past gave their time and love even to the death. But there were examples that they used the churches for intelligence purposes. The Chinese government is seriously preventing outside forces from influencing China in bad ways. And they also are afraid of the power which is formed from the bottom.³⁰

The pandemic didn't really influence us. Because much of how people are conducting church now is the same as when a few years prior the crosses on churches were forced to be taken down. They separated into cell groups. Once separated into cell groups, each group was able to engage even more new people, and even more people were encouraged to come out to serve/minister. As more people need to actively engage in serving, the cell groups would take turns to host meetings, need someone to lead, and many different ministries. So, during the time of the crosses being taken down, many of the current methods/church policies were being carried out. So, when the pandemic started, we just kept the methods that were in place.³¹

27. Participant M6, interview (paraphrased).

28. Participant M13, interview with the author, September 27, 2021.

29. Participant M13, interview.

30. Participant M16, interview.

31. Participant W10, interview with the author, September 24, 2021.

The Status of Chinese House Churches (2022)

The Chinese house churches are different from the three-self churches, which are officially called “Three-Self Patriotic Movement, The People’s Republic China (PRC) government-sanctioned Protestant church from 1954.” There are two main purposes for the movement. One is to isolate and prevent foreign powers from injecting money to support activities against the government. The second is to monitor the congregations to prevent them from spreading ideas which are against the government. (To the author, this view expresses a kind of fear and lack of self-confidence.) And the Chinese house churches are those not registered to the Religious Bureau of China. Therefore, several laws have been put in place and the Chinese house churches are considered illegal.

Several respondents commented about characteristics of the house churches.

The most suitable way is for the local church to conduct this counseling to be able to help returnees. But if the local church is not able, then the churches will need some other organization, even an outside organization’s help. It’s important for them to help so that the returnee would be more integrated with the local church, not creating distance between the local church and the returnee. But it is a more difficult task.³²

The Chinese theological training process didn’t start when Chinese people went to foreign countries. The earliest seminary in China was started by missionaries who came to China. They started classes, studies, and eventually colleges and universities. Instead of focusing on how to renovate the current theological training system [we] will need to find how to better customize theological training so that it will be beneficial to local cultures and environments. Currently, within China there is a lack, and not being able to have physical facilities (not counting underground churches and training centers). So previously, the local ministers were trained by missionaries from another country. Then these local ministers can in turn train more local ministers. This type of teaching would be lacking in depth, as it is not as thorough as a formal curriculum. But these local ministers have had great impact.³³

Most churches, especially in large cities, factoring in the pandemic, are facing the reality of having to break up into smaller groups. But it’s not quite the same as small churches that grew big. Currently, it’s large churches (whose congregants didn’t necessarily grow

32. Participant M1, interview.

33. Participant M2, interview.

up in house churches) that are forced into smaller groups/gatherings, or small groups, where methods are foreign to the congregants. Medium-size cities and churches—these churches have more pressure in terms of survival as a church. Their spiritual maturity and the ability to seek support are also much more limited in comparison with large churches in large cities. In the southwest parts of China, as this has been a focus area for evangelism for some time, there are support means (from outside sources). But even in a medium-sized city, there is also (at least one) returnee fellowship/ministry. These churches in medium-sized cities are facing more challenges when they encounter returnees, and how to minister to them, as the cultural differences are even greater.³⁴

The new restrictions on local house churches are a new challenge for the churches in China. Previously people relied on personal sharing of the gospel, but now people cannot use lips any longer. People can only display our Christ-like life to spread the gospel. So, within the churches in China there should be importance placed upon workplace ministry/mission. How to help brothers and sisters live out exemplary lives as testimonies for Christ in their workplace. How to enable their co-workers to see that they are Christians, [which would] intrigue others to seek them out, and through them to bring them to church. This is something that cannot be taught in a simple way; people must be really changed [in their lives] life by God. But churches have a responsibility to have preparations for the congregation, like having prepared a fertile soil to enable good growth. This may be a road that we need to embark on.³⁵

Owing to the Covid-19 pandemic, the local house churches' activities mainly will be online, but the pastors would go to the physical location and live cast the preaching. But the gatherings now are much smaller. The largest gathering . . . prior to the restrictions was about three hundred to four hundred people. So now it is no more than fifty. Due to the pandemic, the method of gathering became online gatherings. After the church was able to resume physical gatherings, suddenly, the landlord and the religious regulation authorities told us that we can no longer meet there. Also told people to separate. So, the church became cell groups at first, then became smaller churches. In large cities like Shanghai and Beijing it's easier to find a suitable church. But for smaller cities it is probably more difficult.³⁶

Restrictions also apply to those working as teachers in universities. In China the government owns many fields, such as the education system, the transportation system, the medical care system, insurance, banking, all heavy industries, and all land. One university teacher describes the situation:

34. Participant M2, interview.

35. Participant W6, interview with the author, August 31, 2021.

36. Participant W16, interview with the author, September 30, 2021.

In an official working place, you will be asked to give up on Christianity. But the one main point they stressed was that one must not share the gospel as a teacher. If someone did this, it is in violation of the Chinese higher education laws, and so I think it makes sense. As at the university a teacher, and taught in medical studies, people would just do one's job as defined. But with regards to what one is doing outside of the campus it was not their business. I didn't have to agree to anything. That event let me realize that within higher education institutions their treatment toward Christian students and teachers is high pressure. If you state on documents that you are a Christian, they will almost always ask you to have a serious talk. Also, these talks are more gas lighting, still a light degree of threat, but not of a severe nature.³⁷

Evangelism and Theological and Cross-Cultural Training for Current Overseas Christian Chinese Students

Returnees experience cultural shock when they enter foreign countries and re-enter China, especially because of the rapid changes in China. Therefore, the returnees will need full preparation and education for the new realities they will face.

In the past ten or so years, we see that more and more students came from China, and went to seminaries either in the US or other countries, and then returned to China to serve. Currently this is still the mainstream. Most of the seminary students from China have close ties with a church back in China; they were sent by their home church. This is a healthier relationship compared with even earlier times, where those who went out to study ended up staying outside of China. (Since ministry working conditions outside of China seem preferable.) Those who came out of China to study are much more willing to return, as they see the need and see the impactful ministry. There is more a sense of duty and honor to return. (As staying outside of China ministry eventually becomes a job.) [More] slowly than previously the workers were sent abroad to be trained. But now returned workers are experienced enough to train other new workers.³⁸

We can think about this way. Currently theological training in China is still in some ways lacking. The one thing the current training has not been able to accomplish is the training of a scholar. As more seminary students from China are sent out to study, as they mostly enter biblical studies, focusing on the Word, as to the traditions of the churches in China. These individuals can eventually become leaders in theological training, where they will still focus on the Bible, including systemic theology, church history. Other fields, like ministerial studies, may not be as quickly applicable back in China. There would be high-quality theological training focused on biblical studies in the not-too-distant future. And for these seminary students to have effective, meaningful work after they graduate, it is

37. Participant W6, interview.

38. Participant M2, interview.

crucial that they keep a close relationship with home church in China. No matter what the future political situation is like, the focus is to have at the same time teachers and students are both localized. Right now, the students are local, but the teachers may be foreign.³⁹

The students today are much different than in previous times. Their needs are different. Their home environmental background has changed, and Chinese societal conditions are also changed in the last forty years, but in their hearts, there is still a need for the gospel. Normally, and mostly it's through some type of care ministry, [one] can share the gospel with them. One of differences is that the reason to come to church, some twenty to thirty years ago, was to seek some type of fellowship, or the warm passionate hearts of the Christians who invited us to go to church. Nowadays, they don't seem to have such strong needs, but still I see the younger members among church being willing to come. About fifteen years ago, at that time, the number of students from China wasn't as many as now. So, during that time each family in the church would adopt one foreign student. It was more organized. But not in recent times, for the number of overseas students are so many. The students' ministry of campus ministry not only involves the colleges in China, but it is also actually part of a larger scope including youth and younger generation. Then it extends to students who are getting ready to go abroad for graduate studies within their original field. It even includes high school students, graduate work, even PhD candidates.⁴⁰

The returnees will experience two kinds and two times of cross-cultural shock. First, when they come to the US, and then when they return to China. They found dramatic changes. The wave of students going abroad or the wave of returnees coming back to China, it's a major trend. More and more students go abroad than in previous generations. In the 1970s and 1980s many students ended up staying abroad, but a large percentage of students who went abroad, starting in the 1990s, will return to China. So, the wave of returnees is a significant trend. Many students, when they went abroad to the US, to the UK, to Europe, would have the opportunity to hear the gospel as it's more open. Including all types of campus ministries, in the US such as InterVarsity or the Crusade organizations, in the UK IFTS, many active organizations are involved in this ministry. Many Chinese churches are also involved in campus ministry. So, many Chinese foreign students came to know Christ Jesus from hearing the gospel while abroad. These are all very positive signs. Why do they need to be prepared as a cross-cultural missionary? One thing is that they must carry a sense of mission when they return. Otherwise without a sense of mission, one's life most likely will just drift around. Likewise, for Chinese students to leave China, they should also carry a sense of mission to study abroad. Going abroad to study is not just to embellish oneself and come back with a good degree to get a good job with a label of being a "returnee." This was the only reason for a Christian student to study abroad, then it's pathetic, too sad. Going abroad is to widen your view, to carry a deeper heart for the kingdom of God, so that what you have learned through your

39. Participant M2, interview.

40. Participant M9, interview.

studies can become something that helps you share the gospel. So, no matter if it's studying abroad, or returning, one must carry a sense of mission.⁴¹

Challenges of Returnees and the Retention Rate

Finally, interviewees commented about the retention rate of returning Chinese Christians.

One of the biggest challenges is the retention rate. The percentage of Chinese foreign students became believers is quite high, but when they return to China to attain employment, their dropout rate is also very high. Within China, some returnee ministries have done some surveys. The surveys show the dropout rate can be as high as 80 to 90 percent. So, one must look at this significant loss. It is very precious that they have heard the gospel while abroad, but why is it that when they return to China and attain employment, then they stop attending church or even are not able to maintain their faith? It is very difficult to come up with a simple answer. But there are at least a few points to understand. First, most of the people who came to understand the gospel [did so] through a cultural lens, and taking the culture into perspective, using English to understand the gospel. There will be a lot of misunderstanding within this context. People didn't really truly understand salvation. Especially factoring in the current US culture of self-centeredness, consumerism, postmodern thinking—under this circumstance there are lost aspects of the true gospel. Second, the true gospel being that Jesus Christ died for us on the cross, that sense of self-sacrificing is something we're to follow, to carry the cross for the gospel. So, to effectively help the returnees the campus ministries need to accurately present the gospel with the help of co-workers who know the mother tongue [Chinese], to be able to make sure that the students can express by themselves the accurate understanding of the gospel. Third, they need to be able to answer who is Jesus, what is the gospel. Not letting this faith become only a method to change my current life. Only a way to let the intellect to get a "message," only an intellectual "spa" kind of understanding. These students, no matter if they went abroad to study, or return to China after they study, ideally, the efforts should be preparing them to become a cross-cultural missionary. Maybe not a professional missionary, but a student missionary, or a young professional missionary, since they're to enter society to carry out the gospel. The time when they enter and leave the US is a two-cross-culture event/experience. The lack of training in understanding cross cultures leads these students to experience serious reverse culture shock. When a student returns, the first tough problem is to find a church. If one cannot find a church, [one's faith] will dwindle and cool off. No matter how firm your personal faith is, it is a matter of time before it dies off. So, it's important to understand the differences.⁴²

The biggest challenges will be that they cannot find a suitable church, which means there will be no faith supporting group, and the high pressure in the work environment, especially in large cities, leaves one without any time to spend on church, faith, or

41. Participant M9, interview.

42. Participant M9, interview.

religion. Also, no cell group, no pastors, no spiritual leaders to encourage them. So, it's no wonder that the dropout rate is high. How much can anyone possibly have self-control/discipline, it's not realistic. Thus, returnees the most important thing is first to return to gospel, use your mother tongue to accurately understand it. Second, to be prepared as a cross-cultural missionary. Why train these returnees as cross-cultural missionaries? Because many times the environment in China is indeed very difficult, very challenging. If a missionary was not properly prepared to face a tough cross-cultural environment, the missionary will fail.

To send returnees, to bless them to return. The church abroad should have already made connections with a suitable church, fellowship, cell group, prior to his/her return. This would be the ideal situation. It is just as bad if we were to send a returnee back but didn't make the proper connection, while also stopped communicating with the returnees, and no one knows what happened to them. This becomes the large numbers of loss as we see it today, loss of fish through a broken net. We need to establish a network of churches to a point that this net is dense enough so that the fish cannot easily be lost.⁴³

There are several ministries in North America that focus on returnees' ministry. The main work is to help make connections. Some are more public/open while some others are more careful/closed. [For] students from China, a Christian school was to provide a way for the students to come to the US to study.⁴⁴

From the responses during the interviews, a clearer picture is formed to plan a strategy which will be workable in the future. Any strategy is not by might and not by power but by the Spirit of God, to see what God is doing, for Jesus said, "Be the place where I am." Is not the huge number of overseas Chinese students a sign of where he is? Are not the fifteen hundred Chinese Christian churches in North America where he is? Are not the restrictions on and persecution of Chinese house churches where he is? Are not the last forty years of rapid growth in China where he is?

The mentor-mentee discipleship training should be brought to today's Chinese churches: not only talk or Bible sharing but demonstrating a changed, Christian life. The sign of reborn lives must be seen not in the number of congregations, the size of the church buildings, the huge red crosses on top of the sanctuaries, but the love of Christ, the faith and hope of God.

43. Participant M9, interview.

44. Participant M11, interview with the author, September 21, 2021.

Outcomes from the Questionnaire

Respondents (anonymous) to the questionnaire offered these comments.

Many Chinese-background Christians in foreign countries are not actually concerned about what is happening in Mainland China. [This may] be due to the struggles of new life and their time and energy [are] already burned out in a new environment, and the family and working place pressure make them only maintain the church life, no more vision, mission or purpose of evangelical motivation exist. The physical needs and spiritual needs will need to be balanced and need to [be] both supported and motivated through the group efforts.

The Jewish communities are doing well as they support each other on both physical and spiritual ways as a whole life related, the communities as big families to get along well and closely support each other. This will be a good example for Chinese Christian in foreign countries.

The Chinese came from totally different political, social background, especially, the [period of the] Chinese Cultural Revolution. It broke the trust and faith between people, it resulted that Chinese in foreign [countries] are typically protective for the relationship building, for the previous experiences will always remind people to be isolated and more personalized.

To gain trust will need time. God is working on his direction, and his grace and salvation are concerned for all people in the world. The Chinese Christian churches will need to always follow the Bible's teaching about the normal Christian life.

Outcomes from the Six Courses

The courses were done through a website because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although face-to-face feedback is best, the responses via email were still fruitful.

The participants in the six courses also answered the questionnaire and participated in the Zoom interviews. Nine of the ten people in the courses evaluated the contents and how well the courses helped them. The evaluation results are encouraging (see table 20), and the courses will be published in the future for reference by Chinese churches.

Conclusions

The research has demonstrated several important points.

1. The senior Chinese Christians are spiritually qualified, but they will need to receive enough up-to-date information about Mainland China before they can be suitable mentors to the Chinese Christian returnees, because many seniors' background is from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or southeast Asia. They will need God's calling to promote them, and they are willing to help.
2. The current situation (2022) of website communication between North America and China is not recommended via Facebook, Google, Yahoo, WeChat, or Zoom meetings. From March 1, 2022, Christian-related words, such as Jesus Christ, heavenly Father, Holy Spirit, hallelujah, or Immanuel, are not recommended to be included in context. Many other channels will need to be used cautiously.
3. A newborn Christian normally will need to use about ten thousand hours to read and study the Bible, pray, and attend and participate in church services before they would become a good leader of future Christians. Thus, when overseas Chinese students come to North American churches, it would be beneficial to assign these students to mature Christians so they can initiate and build a relationship.
4. It is strongly recommended that North American Chinese churches search for and reconnect to previous members who attended the churches. They can then share the love of Christ and give as much real support as possible for their needs, especially those who have lost connection to the church.

The research further demonstrates that for the purpose of increasing retention rates, there is considerable merit in the development of a “Train the Trainer” program designed to help senior Chinese Christians act as mentors to young Chinese Christians. The sections below give suggestions for how such a program may be employed going forward.

Where Will the Results Take Us?

The vision (God’s salvation is for all people on earth) and the mission (to share the gospel, baptize, and teach people to obey God’s Word) are brought about in part by the objective: to the end of the world, Christian returnees will share the gospel and demonstrate God’s love. When 30 percent of Mainland Chinese believers attend, Chinese Christians will be new missionaries to other parts of the world.

The strategy, then, is that

1. Chinese Christian churches will start to monitor new students and campus outreach mission groups should be built. Individuals and families will be assigned to new students by church leaders to support them, monitor them, and evaluate them periodically.
2. Chinese churches will become an evangelical model, not only a social place. The current cell groups will become a place to establish sound practice, and the cell group will be always welcome newcomers.
3. The mentor-mentee relationship should be promoted by church leaders, who encourage Christians to follow Jesus’ way and commandments. There will be outreach to students, whether they have graduated or are still in campus. A new

approach, one that is active rather than passive, should be followed, as Jesus approached his disciples and initiated the contact.

4. The cell group will become more family style and take the Jewish community as a good example. They not only gather regularly, but also the gathering has a good procedure. It involves many different activities and separate groups (e.g., children of similar ages, young adults).
5. Friday nights, the whole of Saturdays, and Sundays before 7 p.m. all can be used as opportunities to gather and offer good programs for all Christians. Therefore, the church will be able to design programs for the cell groups and church missions' group.

The trends are that the devil (the king of the world) will always try to stop evangelical missions. Therefore, church prayer meetings, personal devotions, and cell group prayer meetings will need to be the top priority. This is spiritual warfare.

The motivation and deeds of people who are involved in evangelical mission will be taught and monitored. Guidelines will be needed and evaluated, for clear guidance will help the cell group operate properly.

All the different missions in the church will need to be shared, presented, and encouraged, but the church must also work to prevent a competitive spirit, which is not God's intention.

What Else Needs to Be Done?

Three tasks will advance the work proposed in this thesis-project.

1. A survey of Chinese three-self churches. The Chinese three-self churches (registered with the Mainland Chinese government) are not included in the study, but in God's kingdom, Jesus said "those who are not against us are helping us." All the Chinese churches should at least pray for each other's missions. Mission burdens will need to be shared, currently by website or by publishing a related book, and maybe later, when the pandemic has subsided, visiting different churches to share the mission.
2. Mentorship promotion video/meetings. People can get used to using the smart phones or media apps to communicate or chat. Maybe a video program will be produced, and media will be used to spread the gospel.
3. The second-generation Chinese (American-born Chinese), and younger Chinese students (e.g., elementary school, high school, or college) are increasing in numbers. The outreach mission will be an excellent opportunity, for most of the time parents will come along, and that is a good opportunity to touch the adults.

APPENDIX A
COVER LETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Cover Letter

Caleb Whitestone
[contact information redacted]

A student of Doctor of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS); names and email addresses of the respondents are to be confidential and anonymous; data will be used only for the report.

THANKS! WE MET IN AMBASSADOR FOR CHRIST (AFC), GCTS, AND MY FRIENDS:
THIS QUESTIONNAIRE IS PART OF MY DMIN RESEARCH PROJECT. PLEASE HELP
DOWNLOAD, FORWARD TO YOUR FRIENDS, AND SEND BACK TO ME BY EMAIL.
GOD BLESS YOU!

Dear [Recipient Name],

God has prepared a group of people who are early overseas Chinese Christians: well educated, sound working experiences, familiar with God's Word, and have been involved deeply in church activities. They are seniors; this group of senior Christians is fully equipped and available, but they will need to be promoted, motivated, and updated for the current China.

There are estimated to be about 50,000 overseas Chinese students in Boston area (around 350,000 in North America, September 2019). Unfortunately, evangelical missions are deficient in manpower, but the current overseas Chinese students (Z Generation) will become China's main leading structure in many fields within the next 20 to 30 years. It is an important opportunity to train future Chinese Christian leaders.

One of the important ways for training young Christian leaders is to follow what Jesus did with his disciples, as a role model and get together for 3 years. If we are to follow this pattern, qualified tutors/mentors will be needed.

The purpose of this Questionnaire Survey is trying to find out the needs and to motivate the senior overseas Chinese Christians.

My research question is: Can mature Chinese Christians living in America be trained as effective mentors for ex-pat Chinese converts (including college students) preparing a return to China?

Thank you very much for your time and your concern to this matter!
May the Lord bless you!

Sincerely,
Caleb Whitestone

Questionnaire

Please choose one number for each question and mark in front.

(1 = no knowledge or understanding of it at all, 2 = some knowledge but little understanding, 3 = some knowledge and some understanding, 4 = much knowledge and some understanding, 5 = much knowledge and much understanding).

1. () How well do you understand the fourteenth Chinese Five-Year-Plan (covering 2021-2025)?
2. () How well do you understand the National Congress of the Communist Party of China?
(中国共产党全国代表大会)
3. () How well do you understand the differences between three-self churches and house churches in China? (三自教会, 家庭教会)
4. () How well do you understand the current religion regulations in China (especially as they apply to the practice of Christianity)?
5. () How well do you understand the current situation regarding restrictions on Christian evangelical mission activities on Chinese university campuses (2019)?
6. () How well do you understand the challenges faced by Chinese Christian returnees (converted to Christianity while they studied overseas)?
7. () How well do you understand the current crackdown on Chinese house churches?

Please choose one number for each question and mark in front.

(1 = I strongly disagree, 2 = I slightly disagree, 3 = I neither agree nor disagree, 4 = I slightly agree, 5 = I strongly agree.).

8. () For the huge number of students, there is an urgent need for Chinese Christians seniors (CCS) to be mentors or trainers of the current overseas Christian students (OCCS).
9. () Chinese Christians seniors (CCS) are well equipped to become mentors or trainers for the OCCS.

10. () Chinese Christians seniors (CCS) are willing “to walk out of their comfort zones” to serve the OCCS.

Please choose one number for each question and mark in front.

(1 = never, 2 = rarely(less than 1xper month), 3 = sometimes (between 1x and 2x per month, 4=often (between 2x and 3x per month), 5 = regularly (1x per week).

11. () On average, over the past 20 years, how often have you shared in Sunday school or a sermon?
12. () On average, over the past 20 years, how often have you attended Bible study meetings?

Demographic Information

Gender: Male []. Female []. Age []. Education []. Years in US []. Years Baptized []

Options: The place you grew up [] Will support the ideas:[]

Comments: _____

APPENDIX B

OVERALL DATA FROM QUESTIONNAIRE, ZOOM INTERVIEWS, AND TRAINING

M = Men		W = Women								
M/W	Age	Education	Years in US	Years Bap-tized	Occupation	Place of Birth	Q 1-7	Q.8-10	Q.11 12	Six Courses
M1	33	MDiv	5	11	Minister	Guangdong C	1 3 5 4 4 5	4	5 4 4	3 5
M2	37	2 Masters	6	19	Minister	China S.West	1 1 5 5 4 3	3	5 3 2	4 4
M3	66	PhD	34	33	Elder/Compu	Taiwan C	1 1 3 3 2 2	3	4 2 2	4 5
M4	41	PhD	8	9	Minister	Henan C	2 5 5 4 3 4	5	5 3 2	5 5
M5	37	MSc MDiv	3	16	Minister	Chongqing	1 3 5 4 5 3	5	3 4 3	5 5
M6	37	PhD Edu.	12	9	Kids Hospital	Beijing C	2 2 4 3 3 4	3	5 4 5	2 5
M7	81	PhD	30	45	Elder Lowell	Taiwan South C	1 2 3 2 3 3	3	3 3 3	5 5
M8	58	Master PhD	31	24	Deacon Lowell	Tianjin C	1 4 3 2 3 4	2	5 5 4	3 5
M9	36	+MDiv	3	15	Paster PhD Stu	Jiang Xi C	3 3 5 4 5 4	5	5 1 1	4 5
M10	60	PhD Papno	30	28	Paster Lowell	Taiwan Taipei C	2 3 3 4 5 5	4	5 5 5	5 5
M11	43	MBA	13	32	GCTS MDiv	Taiwan Zhan Hua	2 2 4 4 4 4	5	5 4 4	2 4
M12	25	MDiv	9	3	GCTS MDiv	Singapore	2 3 3 3 2 3	4	5 4 4	5 5
M13	33	MSc Compu	11	10	E.E. engineer	Zhejiang C	2 2 3 3 3 3	3	5 2 2	2 5
M14	27	MSc Civil	3	10	GCTS MDiv	Shenyang C	3 3 4 5 4 3	5	5 5 4	4 5
M15	25	Bachelor PhD	5	11	Medical	UK London	2 2 1 2 1 2	2	2 2 2	2 5
M16	42	Manag	30	20	Elder Lowell	Cheng Du C	2 3 4 5 5 5	5	3 3 3	5 5
W1	47	PhD Bio-te	21	20	GCTS MDiv	Taiyuan Shanxi C	1 1 2 3 3 3	2	3 3 3	4 5
W2	38	MSc MDiv+	7	5	Israel Seminary	Datong Shanxi C	1 2 3 3 2 2	3	3 2 3	5 5
W3	55	MSc MDiv	4	32	GCTS MDiv	Hubei C	2 5 5 3 3 5	5	5 3 3	3 4
W4	32	Piano	24	19	GCTS Consulo	US since8 Years	1 2 2 2 2 1	1	4 2 3	2 3
W5	36	MSc BeijingU	3	17	GCTS Campus	Beijing C	2 2 4 3 4 1	2	4 3 4	5 5
W6	39	Neobio	4	15	GCTS MDiv	Nanjing C	2 3 5 5 5 4	5	4 3 3	5 5
W7	59	Bachelor	23	23	Trading Logist	Taipei Taiwan C	1 1 2 2 3 2	3	3 5 4	5 5
W8	26	College	13	7	CVS	Guangdong C	2 3 3 2 3 3	3	5 5 4	4 4

W9	27	2Msc+BU	5	5	Analysis		2 4 5 5 5 5			
					Compu	Beijing C	4	3 2 2	5 5	
W10	22	Master Fin	5	12	Financial	Wenzhou	2 3 4 4 4 3			
		Bachelor			Analy	C	4	2 2 4	4 4	
W11	21	Pia	3	14	Music	Hefei	1 2 3 3 4 2			
		Bachelor			postprodu	Anhui C	4	5 5 4	5 4	
W12	22	Music	3	7	Music	Xian	3 3 4 3 2 4			
					Performer	Shanxi C	5	4 4 3	5 5	
W13	24	Master Fin	6	11	Financial	Guangzhou	1 3 4 2 4 3			
					Analy	C	3	4 4 4	2 5	
W14	22	MSc Edu	5	7	School	Wenzhou	2 4 5 1 2 4			
					teacher	C	4	5 4 5	3 5	
W15	23	MSc MDiv	1	7	Missionary	Malaysia	1 1 1 2 2 1			
					Gordon	Taipei	1	4 2 4	5 5	
W16	29	MSc	6	6	College	Anhui C	2 3 4 5 5 1			
		PhD			CVS	Taishan	5	5 5 4	3 5	
W17	26	Medical	16	6	manager	Guang C	1 1 1 1 3 1			
					Missionary		3	5 5 5	3 5	5 4 5 5 4 5
W18	24	MDiv	6	6	Spain	Nanjing C	1 1 2 2 1 1			
							2	5 2 4	2 5	
W19	51	Dmin	21	20	Minister	China	1 1 4 4 4 4			
					Computer		3	4 3 3	5 5	
W20	35	MSc	12	15	Analy	Hong Kong	1 2 3 2 3 4			
		PhD					3	5 3 4	2 3	
W21	35	Biochemist	14	14	Bio/Theology	Jilin C	1 2 4 3 3 3			
							3	4 3 3	2 4	

APPENDIX C

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Table 1. Age

Age Group	20-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61 or more
Men	3	6	3	3	1
Women	11	6	1	3	0
Total	14	12	4	6	1
Percentage	14/37=37.83	12/37=32.43	4/37=10.81	6/37=16.21	1/37=2.7

Table 2. Educational Level

Education	Bachelor	Master	Doctoral	Remarks
Men	1	8	7	
Women	4	12	5	1 college
Total	5	20	12	
Percentage	5/37=13.51	20/37=54.05	12/37=32.43	

Table 3. Number of Years in the United States

Years	1-10	11-20	21-30	31 or more
Men	8	3	3	2
Women	13	4	4	0
Total	21	7	7	2
Percentage	21/37=56.76	7/37=18.92	7/37=18.92	2/37=5.4

Table 4. Number of Years Baptized

Years	1-10	11-20	21-30	30-40	40 or more
Men	5	6	2	2	1
Women	9	10	1	1	0
Total	14	16	3	3	1
Percentage	14/37=37.85	16/37=43.25	3/37=8.1	3/37=8.1	1/37=2.7

Table 5. Church-Related Occupations

Church-Related	Pastor	Elder	Minister	MDiv student
Men	3	4	3	3
Women	1	0	2	7
Total	4	4	5	10
Percentage	4/37=10.8	4/37=10.8	5/37=13.5	7/37=27.02

Table 6. Occupations Other Than Church-Related

General	Business	Medical	Art	Remarks
Men	5	2	0	4 elders are also in business
Women	6	3	2	
Total	11	5	2	
Percentage	11/37=29.73	5/37=13.51	2/37=5.4	

Table 7. Places of Origin (Provinces Listed from Northeast to Southwest)

Northeast	North	Central/West	East	South	Abroad
Jilin1	Beijing3	Henan1	Zhejiang 3	Guangdong 4	Singapore 1
Liaoning1	Tianjin1	Hubei 1	Anhui 4	Fujian1	Malaysia 1
	Shanxi 2	Chongqing 2	Jiangxi1	Hong Kong 1	UK London 1
	Shaanxi 1			Taiwan5	
	Ningxia 1			Hainan1	

Table 8. Responses to Question 1

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	6	8	2	0	0
Women	12	8	1	0	0
Total	6+12=18	8+8=16	2+1=3	0	0
Percentage	18/37=48.65	16/37=43.24	3/37=8.1	0	0

Table 9. Responses to Question 2

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	2	5	7	1	1
Women	6	6	6	2	1
Total	8	11	13	3	2
Percentage	8/37=21.62	11/37=29.71	13/37=35.12	3/37=8.1	2/37=5.41

Table 10. Responses to Question 3

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	1	0	6	4	5
Women	2	4	4	7	4
Total	3	4	10	11	9
Percentage	3/37=8.1	4/37=10.81	10/37=27.03	11/37=29.71	9/37=24.32

Table 11. Responses to Question 4

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	0	3	4	6	3
Women	2	7	7	2	3
Total	3	10	11	8	6
Percentage	3/37=8.1	10/37=27.03	11/37=29.71	8/37=21.62	6/37=16.22

Table 12. Responses to Question 5

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	1	2	5	4	4
Women	1	5	7	5	3
Total	2	7	12	9	7
Percentage	2/37=5.41	7/37=18.92	12/37=32.43	9/37=24.31	7/37=18.92

Table 13. Responses to Question 6

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	0	2	6	5	3
Women	6	3	5	5	2
Total	6	5	11	10	5
Percentage	6/37=16.22	5/37=13.51	11/37=29.71	10/37=27.03	5/37=13.51

Table 14. Responses to Question 7

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	0	2	5	3	6
Women	2	3	8	4	4
Total	2	5	13	7	10
Percentage	2/37=5.41	5/37=13.51	13/37=35.12	7/37=18.92	10/37=27.03

Table 15. Responses to Question 8

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	0	1	3	1	11
Women	0	1	4	8	8
Total	0	1+1=2	3+4=7	1+8=9	11+8=19
Percentage	0	2/37=5.4%	7/37=18.92%	9/37=24.32%	19/37=51.35%

Table 16. Responses to Question 9

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	1	3	4	5	3
Women	0	6	7	3	5
Total	1	9	11	8	8
Percentage	1/37=2.7	9/37=24.32	11/37=29.72	8/37=21.62	8/37=21.62

Table 17. Responses to Question 10

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	1	5	3	5	2
Women	0	1	8	10	2
Total	1	6	11	15	4
Percentage	1/37=2.7	6/37=16.2	11/37=29.7	15/37=40.5	4/37=10.81

Table 18. Responses to Question 11

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	0	4	2	4	6
Women	0	5	4	3	9
Total	0	9	6	7	15
Percentage	0	9/37=24.32	6/37=16.22	7/37=18.92	15/37=40.54

Table 19. Responses to Question 12

Code	1	2	3	4	5
Men	0	0	0	2	14
Women	0	0	2	5	14
Total	0	0	2	7	28
Percentage	0	0	2/37=5.41	7/37=18.92	28/37=75.68

Table 20. Evaluation of the Six Courses

Lists	M3	M6	M7	M10	M14	W1	W3	W6	W17
Course 1	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Course 2	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	5	4
Course 3	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	5
Course 4	5	5	5	4	5	3	5	5	5
Course 5	5	4	5	5	5	4	4	5	4
Course 6	4	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	5

APPENDIX D
CONTENT OF THE SIX TRAINING COURSES

Course 1: What Is the Most Important Task for Our Life?

The overall mission for all Christians today is to follow the word of Jesus and focus on Matthew 24:14 (HCSB and AMP): “This good news of the Kingdom (the Gospel) will be proclaimed (preached) in all the inhabited earth (throughout the whole world) as a testimony to all nations. And then the end will come.”

In brief, the core of the biblical and theological framework of this thesis-project is that Jesus will be coming back; the promises of a new kingdom will be fulfilled; the heavenly Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God in one; the eternal God has all authority in heaven and on earth; the objective and obligation for Christians are to take actions to make disciples and to share the gospel with all nations; God will work with Christians until the end of the world; and in his second coming he will judge all the works done by each Christian. As the growth of a mature Christian (disciple) is a process and this growth needs time, a mentor can guide the stable growth of a mentee.

The content of this course focuses on five topics:

Vision: the second coming of Jesus, the new kingdom in heaven, and the judgment of Christians and the world

Mission: to preach the gospel to all nations, and then the end will come

Objective: The Great Commission is to make disciples of all nations

Strategy: to rely and depend on the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

Tactics: The Greatest Commandment is to love God and neighbors

Vision

The vision that is described for Christians in the Scriptures could be a long and wide picture that is accompanied by a time frame. One could imagine it as a movie with many layers of content, and some content will be understood later. The vision is created from God's creation of the universe and will end with the eternal new kingdom (Rev 22:12-13, HCSB and AMP). A Christian should know the things related to his or her life while in this world. Vision will determine the direction and values that will form the purpose of life, the value system of life, and the meaning of life. The final judgment will tell what will be evaluated, what will be the rewards, and hence what kind of behaviors will be expected by the heavenly Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Wise people will consider the teaching of Scripture; their actions and behaviors will prepare people to stand before the judgment seat of Christ, face to face with God.

The promises of God are listed in Matthew 16:27 (AMP) and Revelation 22:4-7 (AMP). God's plan and his creation purposes will be fulfilled; the Bible has presented his overall plan from the beginning to the end. The plan in general should be able to be understood, although not in every detail. It includes Jesus' second coming, his judgment, the fulfillment of his kingdom, and the new heaven and earth. All these things are true and will be done. This is his love, and a Christian will receive it by faith in earnest expectation. The plan is an ongoing process, in which some events have happened and have been proven. For example, the prophetic Scriptures have been fulfilled by Jesus' birth, his death on the cross, and his resurrection. From the Old Testament to the New Testament, there is evidence for the future promises which are yet to happen and are clearly described.

The most amazing promise is that Jesus is preparing a place in heaven for Christians (John 14:1-6, NIV). The promise of heaven gives direction to life, and the meaning as well as

purpose of life can be defined. The vision will give direction, and the clear destination will be fulfilled by faith and hope, for God's love and promises will never fail.

Christians have already received the promise of eternal life and a place to live in eternity, and Christians are building on the foundation of Christ Jesus every day on earth. The outcomes of their faith and works will be tested by fire: those works which remain will last. Not everyone is equal in heaven; their place will depend on what people have sown in their lifetime and will receive the harvest as a result.

Mission

Christians are to preach the gospel to all nations, and then the end will come (Matt 24:14, HCSB and AMP).

To proclaim and preach the gospel to all nations is the mission of all Christians (Rom 10:12-15, NIV). "All nations" includes all lands with human beings in them, no matter how far the place or how different the cultures, nationalities, languages, customs, or traditional religions. The gospel needs to be preached and proclaimed, and then the end of the world will come, and the final judgment will occur. Therefore, there is a time limitation for the task. Jesus and his disciples always proclaimed that the kingdom is near, and people need to repent.

God's plan will be fulfilled step by step, and God's plan often involves Christians' activities. The miracles of Jesus often involve human action.

At the wedding in Cana (John 2:1-11, NIV), Jesus' mother told the servants to do whatever Jesus told them to do. Jesus filled the water jars with good wine and satisfied the guests. By the actions of the servants, Jesus revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

With five loaves and two small fish (John 6:5-11, NIV), Jesus provided all the food needed for a crowd. Jesus did a miracle in front of all the people and demonstrated his authority and power. The glory of God then appeared among the people.

If Jesus had wanted, he could have given an order, and the stone would have been removed by his words and commands (John 11:38-42, NIV). Instead, Jesus asked people to move the stone from Lazarus's tomb, and the result was that the people experienced the manifestation of God. After his prayer to God, people believed that Jesus was sent by God.

Jesus could make a coin to pay the tax (Matt 17:26-27, NIV), but the miracle was done by involving Peter's fishing. God is pleased to involve his disciples to take part in an action.

This incident of the miraculous catch of fish (Luke 5:4-11, NIV) illustrates a lesson about obedience and the supernatural power of Jesus. God's knowledge is much higher than our experiences. Normally, Christians use a logical way of thinking to judge things, but God's power is far beyond our imaginations. Jesus used this incident to announce the life mission of Peter. When Peter obeyed God's order, his eyes would be opened and new paths opened for him.

Objective

In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded his disciples in turn to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20, HCSB and AMP). After his resurrection, Jesus presented himself to the eleven disciples, and they were baptized with the Holy Spirit. The disciples received the power and authority to be Jesus' witnesses to the end of the earth (Acts 1:4, 8, 14; 2:1-4, HCSB).

For contemporary Christians, the mission is the same, the objective is clear, and the Commander in Chief of the universe, with all authority from God, has promised that he will be with Christians to finish the tasks to the end of the world. Action will be required, as Jesus

commanded, “Go.” The mission is not standing or only talking but moving forward no matter how hard the soil. There is no turning back while working on the farm.

The disciples of Jesus received power from the Holy Spirit to be witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection, and they obeyed God’s command, waited until the time came, and devoted themselves to prayer. Jesus authorized the disciples to be his witnesses and provided them with the power to preach and proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

The Great Commission is not about increasing the number of church members, nor is the goal to build a wonderful world. Many people have shifted the goal as being to make more believers, to have more people be baptized as a Performance Measure Indication (PMI), and to build a good reputation and gain personal praise. However, the Great Commission focuses on saving the spiritual lives of people.

To make a sound disciple is not a one-day mission. Discipleship is a process, with steps of growth. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, a disciple needs a mentor to guide and watch over the growth of the mentee. When the growth reaches a period of greater maturity, the mentee will become a mentor. This model was presented by the apostle Paul and Timothy. In this thesis-project, this model is called “train the trainer.”

A disciple not only is called by the title but also must fully accept and receive salvation. When one believes in the name of Jesus, salvation saves the sinner’s life and washes all sins away because of the blood of Jesus shed in his death on the cross for the world’s sins. A disciple believes in Jesus’ resurrection and that he will come again to judge the world. At last Jesus will bring Christians to live with him in heaven.

A disciple must experience life change, that is, to be reborn, which means to live a new life that is different from the world’s value systems, life purpose, and fame and wealth. A

disciple separates himself or herself from what the physical body wants or to be lazy and not do what one should achieve.

Disciples are baptized by the Holy Spirit and guided by the Holy Spirit. Disciples put God first in life and serve him as the only master. They do what is to be done and do it well: serve God with all the heart, mind, soul, and strength. Disciples strive to love their neighbors as themselves, to have Christ-like vision, and to observe the needy and to have mercy on the poor and the sick.

A disciple needs gradually to know God well and expects to serve God more correctly. He or she will love God more deeply, growing in Christ not only for oneself but to love and care for others. The path of growth includes trials, suffering, and hard times, but growth will remain. A disciple learns lessons from the Scriptures and other Christians, and he or she one day will be a fine example to younger Christians.

Strategy

The strategy for Christians is to rely and depend on the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17, 21-26, AMP).

To love God is to keep his commands. The promises and blessings a disciple would receive come only by keeping God's commands. Further, Christians receive a Comforter, Counselor, Helper, Intercessor, Advocate, Strengtheners—the Holy Spirit. When the Holy Spirit is within the heart of a disciple, that person receives support and help, spiritually, mentally, and physically. The blessings are received through the promises of the Giver, who owns everything; all kinds of resources are found in his hand. The Giver is God himself. He is the only reliable

Giver and will always fulfill his promises if the receivers are willing and obedient to his Word (Isa 1:19, NIV).

The Lord has all authority in heaven and on earth, and disciples obey him. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are God in one and function simultaneously. The Father gives Jesus all authority, power, glory, and the kingdom. Jesus was sent to the world and fulfilled the mission that was assigned by the Father. When Jesus lived on earth, every detail had been prophesied in the Old Testament. Step by step Jesus gradually fulfilled his mission according to God's schedule. After Jesus was baptized, he was proclaimed the Son of the Father. After he went through trials and tests, Jesus started to select his disciples and trained them by living with them. Therefore, the disciples were able to observe and learn. It is an important principle that learners will need to obey their teachers and masters. Obedience will not be forced but comes from appreciation and respect. Jesus obeyed the Father, and so should his disciples obey him. Jesus gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples on Pentecost; Jesus asked the Father, and he gave the wonderful gift. The Holy Spirit will be with Christians always.

The link is that Jesus obeyed the Father, and the Father's teaching was what Jesus taught, because Jesus said that all his words and works came from the Father. Jesus was not preaching himself but the Father, and those who learned his commands and obeyed would be praised and would receive love from Jesus and so from the Father. Jesus promised that he will reveal himself to those who obey his command.

The Holy Spirit will be with Christians and guide us; the Trinity will be with us always (Matt 28:20, NIV). The Holy Spirit was sent on behalf of the Son and would teach Christians all things that the Father and the Son have taught. The Holy Spirit will recall and remind Christians

of all things they have learned. This gift and promise will last forever if Christians listen to his voice.

Tactics

The Great Commandment is to love God and neighbors (Mark 12:28-34, HCSB and AMP).

The Lord our God is one, and a disciple must serve the only God. God is a jealous God. The Lord is the disciple's master, so one cannot serve the world (money) and the one Lord. A disciple cannot be loyal to two masters. No one would receive rewards by serving two masters, and often one easily puts himself into temptation by wishing to receive both worldly wealth and doing wrong against the only God. With a double-minded heart one cannot be a disciple.

Love for God starts from the disciple's heart and includes the soul, mind, and strength; a person's physical, mental, and spiritual parts need to surrender to God. People can promise with their mouths but not with their hearts, which is a kind of cheating. This cheating would not be accepted by God, for God is the truth, the way, and the life. God requires a pure heart to face him. Absolute loyalty is required to be a faithful disciple.

A person who does not love himself or herself will not be able to love others, for that person does not know what love is. Often people find excuses to hurt themselves, but one who rightly loves himself or herself will not continue in harmful habits, as those habits would damage the spiritual, mental, and physical aspects of the person. Human beings are naturally selfish but choosing laziness or ease for a wrong joy is a sin. To love one's neighbor includes love for good persons and bad persons. Even one's enemies or a person who hurts one may be, through the

teaching of God, a blessing for one to learn endurance, patience, and loving unlovely friends, classmates, and all different human beings.

After Jesus was baptized, heaven was opened, and a voice said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Baptizing and teaching in the name of the Trinity are not only for understanding in the mind but also relate to the functions of the soul and the spirit. Therefore, baptizing and teaching will involve the higher level of God’s functioning. The Holy Spirit will come into the heart of a Christian and remind the Christian of what he or she has learned. When a Christian goes on a wrong path, the Holy Spirit will warn him or her to change back to the right track.

Summary

Jesus and his disciples lived together for about three and half years on earth as mentor and mentees, His disciples observed all his behaviors, learned his teachings and responses in different situations, and his heart (John 14:21, HCSB). Many examples were recorded in the New Testament. The disciples soon received the Holy Spirits to lead them continuously, just as their Mentor had. This is an excellent example of leadership to learn.

The Great Commission and the Greatest Commandment will be applied to all the universe, and to love God and neighbors is what Christians must focus on (Matt 22:37-40, NIV). Without love, no disciple can be formed. The mentor needs to love the mentees, a good Christian leader needs to lead by love, and a teacher needs to love the students. The mentee needs to love the mentor, a follower needs to love the leader, and a student needs to love the teacher. Thus will a joyful relationship be formed, but where is the love to be found? Only with Jesus’ help can we love and be loved. Jesus said, “The one who has My commandments and keeps them is the one

who loves Me; and the one who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will reveal Myself to him” (John 14:21, NASB).

Course 2: What Will Be Our Life’s Final Judgment and Rewards?

The judgment is according to everything Christians performed (2 Cor 5:10, AMP). Many times, the Scriptures refer to a farmer who worked for a long time and longed for a good harvest that would bring the whole family joy and sufficient supplies for the entire year. Therefore, people would be conscientious about planting seeds, deciding the right place, preparing the soil, watering, and taking care that harm would not come to the crops. Both outside and inside work is to be taken care of. A farmer would need time to accumulate experience (that is, to mature) and to be taught by old farmers. A farmer can learn not only through knowledges but also through sufficient practice to adopt fully the methods of doing things in the right ways. Many may develop new ways of doing things, but without good a foundation the work will never be counted. People would call them blessed if they could learn from good mentors.

Scripture teaches about judgment in detail.

Who Is the Judge?

To begin, Jesus Christ is the authorized judge (John 5:22; 2 Tim 4:8, NIV). The Father honors the Son, and so a Christian would also do so. The judge is righteous, so the righteous nature is within Christians and all people on earth. When God created human beings, he put a spirit in them, and humans were created in the image and likeness of God. Although people were created in the image of God, to have righteous minds and hearts, because of the Fall they cannot follow what is right. Greed, selfishness, jealousy, anger, and many worldly desires occupy their

minds, and they decide to find excuses to do what is wrong. People know what is wrong, but they have it done anyway. This is how much people need the salvation of Jesus Christ.

Who Will Be Judged?

Everyone will be judged (Rom 14:12; 1 Cor 3:2-15; 2 Cor 5:10; Eccles 12:14, NIV). Judgment is according to God's orders and standards. People will be judged by what they had done, and they will receive the harvest by their efforts during their lifetime. Therefore, there are no excuses, no complaints, no blame of others; each person will be responsible for what had been done. People normally will remember all things which have happened and have been done by them. There must be a huge database in heaven in which is recorded all motivations and the true reasons of all things that have been performed. Each person will receive individual judgment.

When Will the Judgment Happen?

The judgment will occur at the second coming, when Jesus comes back for his church (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:14-18, NIV). No one knows the exact time of his second coming. Jesus said only the Father knows—even the Son does not know. And when the time is near there will be false news about his second coming. The true signs of Jesus' second coming are described in the Scriptures, but many people will not understand until it happens. Now, people will understand what has happened according to the Scripture, and it is like gradually opening the scrolls. But the most important fact is that it will surely come very soon. A wise person will not take chances and try to hide but will faithfully obey God's way to live on earth: to love God, to love our neighbors, and to take responsibility to share the gospel to all nations.

Why Will People Be Judged?

People will be judged because all have sinned (Rom 3:23-24, AMP; Rom 3:10, AMP; Isa 43:27-28, AMP), and the price of sin is death. All have sinned, because human beings possess a sinful nature which is affected by the devil, the king of the world. Jesus was tempted by the devil but won that trial. Nonetheless, the love of God sent his Son to pay for the price of the Fall. Jesus proved that there was no sinfulness in him. Jesus offered himself as a sin offering and died for all human beings.

People must be without sin to be with the pure heavenly Father and to be a part of the new kingdom. The sins of people have been paid by Jesus' death on the cross. How great the blessing is! But this good news Christians need to proclaim to all the nations and to make disciples.

What Things Will Be Judged?

Christians will be judged for multiple things, one of those being faithfulness (Matt 25:21-23; 1 Cori 4:2-5, NIV). All Christians hope someday the Lord will call them good and faithful servants. ("Faithful" means trustworthy, reliable, consistent, having integrity, not telling lies, having no hidden sins and wrong desires. "Good" means having fine results and reputation, doing good deeds.) With this announcement, people will be rewarded not only the title but also many blessings and can be a guest of the Lord at the same table. Today, a rich businessman would have to pay a high price to have a lunch with Warren Buffett, but what an honor it will be to have a chance to share a table with the Almighty! He is the Creator of the universe, and all authority, kingdoms, and power belong to him.

Christians must also be obedient to God's commandments and leading (Luke 12:48; Heb 5:9; 1 John 5:2-3; John 5:24; 14:21, 23; Rom 8:1, NIV). Obedience is one of the most important characteristics in a military system. All soldiers follow the orders and commands of their officers. Obedience is always related to what one should do and what one is forbidden to do; there are no excuses for not following the commands. Reward or punishment will be the outcome of evaluation. From the beginning human beings failed to follow the command of God and tried to blame others as well as find excuses, and the punishment was severe. The love of God sent Jesus to be a sin offering and to save those people who believe and receive salvation. This all was caused by human disobedience. Those who obey and produce good results will receive more responsibilities.

People will also be judged for the words they speak (Matt 12:6-37, ESV). Everything a person has in his or her heart will be on the lips. Even words which are not spoken but are in the mind and heart will not be able to be hidden. God will judge the heart and soul of each person at the final judgment.

Our attitudes will be judged, too (Matt 5:22, ESV). A person's attitude could be shown by facial expressions or actions. The words selected, the tone, and the speed of the words all start from the heart and reflect one's internal attitudes. To guard a person's heart is the key to having correct attitudes, and good attitudes encourage a person and lift one from difficulty.

Hidden sins will be judged (Mark 4:22; Rom 2:16, ESV). A wrong desire or a wrong motivation can lead to wrong behaviors. People know there will be judgment if something goes wrong. People always wish to win praise from others and to boast about themselves, but God Almighty knows everything in the universe. There will be no place to hide. People's hearts know

right from wrong, and people always try to hide what is wrong, because judgment is real. There is no secret of men that will not be judged by Christ Jesus.

Character is another quality that will be judged (Rom 2:5-11, ESV). People possess different talents, but talents need training and development before they can be explored. Character can be developed by following of the teaching of Scripture to build a Christ-like character. To be Christ-like is the life goal.

Our work and service are subject to judgment (1 Cor 3:13-15, ESV). Everyone wishes to have achievements, so the desires and ideas of what a person wants in his heart will motivate activities and actions. If the works and service achieve a good consequence and receive praise, then the person would be full of joy but not necessarily followed by peace and love. Achievements may cause jealousy and feelings of injustice. Therefore, competition in sports needs clear game rules and fair referees or umpires. Otherwise, the achievement may cause even more painful experiences. Therefore, our works and achievements must be considered by the final judgment of God, not the people around us. Most of the time we know the truth in our hearts. Each person must be honest in the judgment.

Further, our motivations will be judged (1 Cor 4:5, ESV). Many times, motivation is kept deeply in a person's heart and is not easily identified, as it could be covered with many colorful disguises. People would learn from the history of an individual: in daily life people need not learn how to lie, but they can be liars. Many advertisements, talk shows, and propaganda may hide the true motivation of heart. But everyone should remember no one can hide anything from God, and at the judgment people must confess all the motivations that were in their hearts.

Moreover, our behaviors will be judged (Eph 6:7-9, ESV). The Holy Spirit reminds Christians what behaviors are expected by God. Many people will serve well and behave

properly when they are in front of their bosses, but this behavior is dangerous and inappropriate. For God is invisible, yet he watches over all of people's actions and behaviors.

Finally, people will be judged based on whether they acted with love (Col 3:18–4:1, ESV). The relationship among people requires faith, hope, and love, and issues in relationships can be solved by love. The relationship within a family and with other people needs love to function well. God wants people to function as if people are walking together with Jesus. Always ask: What would Jesus do? This helps us to keep good relationships and to be full of Christ-like love for others.

What Are the Rewards of the Judgment?

A reborn Christian is a member of God's kingdom, a son or daughter of God, and an heir who will receive an inheritance. A true Christian will receive different levels of reward according to the judgment of his or her performance as described in Scripture. A short list of rewards follows.

One reward is to receive joy, unashamed (1 John 2:28, NIV). Christians will receive peace, joy, and love, which money cannot buy, and which are the most important reasons for people to live on earth. Christians in the future will live in these models together with the Lord in his kingdom.

A second reward is to receive praise (Matt 25:21, NIV). Praise from God as a faithful servant will be the best gift for Christians who follow Jesus. It is confirmation from God himself and will last forever. What honor can be higher than this? A wise person will do the right things to win this praise.

A third reward is to receive responsibility and authority (Matt 25:14-30, NIV). This is a well-known principle that the world proclaims today, but the difference is that a Christian would not work for higher position or responsibility. Receiving more responsibility and position is a result of good works, and Christians should aim to obey God's words and mission.

A fourth reward is to receive position (Matt 19:29-30, NIV). We easily fail to honor God first, for the dark side of human nature does truly exist and people are greedy for positions, titles, and status. However, in heaven positions will depend on the works people did during their lifetime on earth.

Fifth, rewards will be given after people have been tested by fire and the goal is achieved (1 Cor 3:12-14; Phil 3:14, NIV). It is important to consider what kind of materials we used to build our metaphorical buildings. A clean heart and pure mind will determine the materials we choose. All motivations will be evaluated.

A sixth and final reward is to receive a crown. This may be a forever crown (1 Cor 9:25, NIV), a crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8, NIV), a crown of life (Col 1:12, NIV), a crown of glory (1 Pet 5:4, NIV), or a crown of a victor (Rev 2:10, NIV).

How Will Christians Prepare for the Judgment?

To prepare for the judgment, Christians are to revere and respect God (2 Cor 5:10-11; Phil 2:12; 1 Pet 1:17, NIV). The fact is that all people will appear before the judgment seat of Christ, beginning with Christians. While people are on earth, God seems invisible to us, and so human nature leads people to pretend he is absent. To obey the Lord's principles and to do his commands, we need to make decisions from our hearts: do we do right or slack? When we revere, respect, and love God, Christians are willing to follow Jesus and will receive reward afterwards.

Christians are to be pure in heart, exercise self-control, and be faithful in the practice of prayer (1 Pet 4:5-8, NIV). A pure heart, self-control, and the practice of prayer are required by God and will receive praise and reward from him. Such discipline is not impossible, but it is difficult because of human nature. Christian maturity is a growing process, and to achieve a mature standard requires consistent effort to strengthen one's spiritual life. Growth in Christian life is achieved gradually. Purity of heart, self-control, and the practice of prayer are lifetime lessons for a Christian. Godliness is our goal to achieve.

Christians are to demonstrate a new lifestyle (2 Pet 3:11-13, NIV), as a new and different spirit is in one's new heart. Christians are to be witnesses of God to show the world how God can change one's life. Christians live not to follow the world's standard and system of values (e.g., they are not greedy for money and fame), but to pursue a Christ-like lifestyle. Such a lifestyle includes being merciful and good-hearted to others (Matt 5:7; 2 Tim 1:16-18, NIV). Jesus showed his love to many sinners and sick people; many miracles were performed because he had mercy on people in need. Paul had compassion for others and appreciated people who had mercy on him. This is a two-way learning course.

Course 3: What Are the Challenges for Returnees?

Many Chinese had converted to Christianity while taking advanced courses for several years in foreign countries, after which they returned to China.¹ However, on their return to China, some of them found it difficult to find a place to worship. By the end of 2018 the total number of returnees to China was calculated as 3,651,400 people. In 2018 alone, more than a half million people returned to China. Among them, between 5 percent and 8 percent converted

1. Han Zhang, "Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home," Foreign Policy, January 26, 2017, accessed August 16, 2021, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/26/chinese-converted-out-west-are-losing-faith-back-home-christian-churches-study-abroad>.

to Christianity while they studied overseas; therefore, 20,500 to 50,000 returnees are converted Christians. However, it was reported that from 80 percent to 85 percent of the converted Christian returnees did not continue to go to churches when they went back to China.²

A response is to train trainers to strengthen young returnees to China. The foundation for this training is Jesus' way of discipleship. A metaphor for the process is that of a kite flown from a distance: no matter how high a kite flies, the trainer (mentor or spiritual parent) will always be connected to the mentee (the young Chinese who return to Mainland China).

To understand the need for training trainers, one must first understand there are external and internal factors for why the problem exists. The external factors and challenges include China's different political structure, religious restrictions on returning Christians, a different economic system, new technology development, and a dissimilar social and cultural structure. The internal factors are different expectations about personal value and status, strong social and market competition, adapting to dissimilar church styles, new family expectations, and many combined internal and external factors.

To find the root causes of this problem, one will better understand if one exchanges one's position, as if he or she was born in Mainland China and understands the different structures and mindsets of China's specific characteristics and current environments.

External Factors and Challenges

China's Different Political Structure

Mainland China is officially run by the Chinese Communist Party government and now calls itself "the Socialism Market Economics with Chinese Characteristics." To this author, it is a

2. Xinhua, edited by Huaxia, "China's Education Internal from 2016 to 2020," December 12, 2020, accessed December 23, 2020, http://www.xinhuanet.com/English/2020-12/23/c_139611486.htm.

combination and transformation of capitalism, socialism, and communism mixed with part of Chinese cultural traditions.

China is a country in which authority is centralized. It was transformed from a military system, so even today the management style and functions are noticeably more like those of a commander to his military troops. Not only does all ownership of land belong to the country, but also most of the utilities and heavy industries are run by the centralized government (e.g., power supply, water supply, fuels, natural gas, the related crude oil industry, steel, and all metals), as well as all the education systems, the transportation systems (e.g., highway, railway, subway), telecom systems, medical systems, postal systems, banking systems, and media systems. All these systems can be called state-owned industries (SOI) or state-owned business (SOB); the foreign initial public offering (IPO) was listed by a good portion of each huge SOI or SOB. The companies and competition were introduced but under government regulation (e.g., all telecom operator heads are assigned by the government). Competition was used to prevent problems of laziness by a monopoly and requirements from the World Trade Organization (WTO). These formations are what the author means by describing China as a country run as a combination of capitalism, socialism, and communism mixed with some Chinese traditional culture.

The human resources or so-called personal management includes monitoring; each person has a personal file in Mainland China which records everyone's activities, including all information about a person, starting from birth and elementary school. When one moves to a new place, one would need to report and submit one's personal file, which is sealed and passed on to the new organization; even if one works in a joint venture of a foreign company, the file would be gathered in a separate place. The new place would keep and update the file, and one's personal information requires full transparency to the government. One's computer, phone calls,

messages, media posts, and so on would all be monitored. When one applies for credit, for example, one's phone number, computer account and bank account, credit card must be registered with one's full, real, official name, and photo identification is required.

Chinese Communist Party members number around 90 million, 6 percent of China's population, which was around 1.38 billion in 2019, and almost all management positions and significant roles of any kind (e.g., the president, the cabinet, governors, municipal officers, country village leaders), as well as almost all government-owned companies, are held by party members. It is not easy for a person to apply for party membership. One must learn what to say and how to say it about any matter concerning about the country, and what not to say.

Christian returnees are challenged by the degree of freedom compared with what they were used to while studying or working in foreign countries. When they return to China and face those centralized authority systems, it is a challenge to adapt to the system and how long it will take to get used to the system. The system may have changed after several years being out of country.

Religious Restrictions on Christian Returnees

One of the most important basic principles of the Chinese Communist Party is atheism. Nonetheless, China's constitution is different regarding religion.

Numbers of Chinese Christians were increasing quickly even during the Cultural Revolution (underground churches thrived between 1966 and 1976). This increase made the government aware that the numbers of Christians were rising; as a result, out of fear the government has controlled and managed Christians. Many regulations of religion show that the restrictions from the Chinese political party were formed by their imagination that Christians

could be gathered as a powerful force that would become a gigantic, hidden danger against or a challenge to the government (e.g., the Tian-An-Men event in 1989 formed a huge crowd that was a colossal threat to the government).

According to the author's observations (from 2001 to 2014 in Beijing, on site) the numerical growth and development of Christians were very rapid. For example, in 2002, when the author visited the Motorola office in Beijing, he joined their Bible study during lunch hour; when the group grew, they moved to the home of a member's family which was near the office. After three or four years the Bible study groups became four new city churches (each has more than one hundred members), and most of the attendees were returnees who had finished advanced studies in foreign countries, especially in the United States. In Beijing, there were many joint-venture foreign industry companies, and many foreign experts from various fields moved to work in Beijing. There were Christians from outside who shared in the Bible studies. This movement was another miracle done by God, and the new city churches did not register with the government. From 2017, Chinese authorities have labeled them illegal gatherings.

The new city churches also started to support the rural house churches in many provinces by giving them computers, as well as many other financial supports, because Chinese rural areas were still in extremely destitute situations. According to many studies, the house churches were growing rapidly.

In 1949, when the Chinese Communists coerced foreign missionaries to leave China, the number of Chinese Christians was counted as near three million, and in 2017–2018 estimates showed the number to be more than ninety million, although the population increased three times (450 million to 1,380 million). The number of Christians increased thirty times, which was another miracle done by God.

In Mainland China, as of 2019, most of the house churches and new city churches (not registered) have been forced to close. Pastors and main workers (elders, deacons, cell group leaders) were charged with illegal conduct, and some were sentenced to jail. New, strong restrictions on spreading the gospel and on gatherings do not allow Sunday schools for children, and people under eighteen are not permitted to attend church meetings. All religious activities and gatherings are forbidden. In three-self churches (registered by the government), the pastor must receive and pass training courses before a preaching license is issued, and the content of sermons must be reviewed and must follow the new instructions of the religious bureau's regulations. Monitoring cameras are installed inside and outside of the churches.

If one is a professor at a university or any grade of teacher, if one works in a hospital as a medical doctor or in any state-owned organization, one will be asked to sign an oath indicating that one does not believe in any religion. Therefore, fresh blood needs to be injected for the future development of Chinese evangelical missions.

Returnees would feel very different while in churches in foreign countries, and they do not feel welcomed at churches in China, as it will take time to gain trust as newcomers from other areas. Church leadership styles are disparate, and some are also quite centralized; the senior pastor possesses authority. Some issues with returnees are the discrepancies of how churches function and how friendships are built. Many local pastors in China do not easily accept the opinions of these highly educated young returnees, which can create obstacles to merging into the new churches' system.

A Different Economic System

The Mainland Chinese government started in 1949. In its first thirty years, from 1949 to 1978, Mainland China adopted the materialism of Marxism, the ideology of which was that a sound society led to a harmonious world. China practiced the theory by conducting People's Communes, which meant the collectivization of agriculture. However, Mainland China paid the consequential and immense price for its demonstration of these theories. As a result, China became a very closed region, and it was poverty-stricken. During this period, it was emphasized that there was no personal property or banking account. Everything belonged to the country (including one's life), everyone dressed in the same clothes with the same color, everyone received the same amount of food tickets, which had the same coupons for cloth, and so on. In the People's Commune, the single family was restructured. One would not need to cook for family, because many people would eat together, as they would in a camp or a military troop. Children would gather; women and men were separated in different working groups; and this communism ideology was called Planned Economics.

When it came to the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), China started to reopen. At that time, especially from 1971 to 1978, a huge wave of people slipped to Hong Kong, and the new leader, Deng Xiaoping, said, “This is a problem with our policy, this is not something the military can manage.”³ Ever since then, China started to open and build a free-trade zone and industrial park near the border of Hong Kong. China also began to allow people to share in the harvest they worked on, and this encouraged people to wake up very early in the morning to work on the assigned farms. It is said it is human nature for people to work for themselves; in communism, which ignores that human nature is self-identity and ownership, without incentive

3. Deng Xiaoping, November 11, 1977, retrieved September 29, 2021, www.hotnews.cc, English translation assisted by computer app.

motivation would be very low, even zero. The collectivization of agriculture—the disastrous policy of communist Russia around 1930 and Mainland China in the 1950s—ended in tremendous suffering.

Another influence of communism is that it introduced idea of “the class struggle,” a result of which is that no one would be able to trust anyone else. People were encouraged to monitor the people around them and report to the people who were in charge. People were asked to confess any wrong idea in their minds and confess any wrong activity they did. Later, this system induced the management of economic activities that could be based only on the real benefits and true gains of any economic exchange and trading. One must learn how to protect oneself from not being cheated or from wrongdoing.

China was run by its Five-Year Plan (FYP), and the fourteenth FYP (2021–2025) will follow the big changes of the 2020 global new environments and challenges.

With the goal of FYP, in 2019 around eight hundred million people were lifted out of poverty (\$2 per day), and the GDP of China surpassed that of many advanced countries. In 2014 China became the second-largest economy in the world. Nevertheless, China is still falling behind in its technological and social structure; besides, scandals in China have been extremely serious. The world’s financial crisis has slowed the speed of China’s growth in 1997, 2003, 2008, and 2019, but returnees were welcome to work in China, and the competitions were serious.

In 2001, when China entered the WTO, it introduced all kinds of regulation of capitalist ideas, and China also referenced many countries’ practice of socialism (e.g., Norway, Finland). China also needed to fulfill regulations required by the WTO, and it planned and promised to practice for fifteen years before fully adopting the regulations. But in 2016 China found the

adjustment time was not enough for this transformation. How China would position its economic standing is a big challenge. Returnees would need to face the different economic systems and find a Christian way to live in this society.

New Technology Development

In 1978, when China started opening, soon Deng Xiaoping visited Singapore, Japan, the United States, and many other countries. He encouraged higher-ranking management officers to visit and observe the advanced countries, and they found that China was far behind the new technologies in most fields. In the next forty years (1979–2018) many industrial parks were organized, and different industries from foreign countries were attracted to build and set up production in China. China's labor force produced great successes, which caused big changes to society and economics. By 2019 supermarkets in the United States were filled with all kinds of products made in China.

China's policies in the early stage were that every foreign company would be required to set up a joint venture with one Chinese company (now China allows for wholly owned foreign entities). Then these joint Chinese companies would be responsible for supporting how the venture would operate: for example, the land which would be needed for the factories (ownership of all land belongs to the government), and all construction, such as water supply, power supply, telecom infrastructure, new highways, and roads for container transportation. Some industrial parks even built standard warehouse and factory facilities. All the necessary conditions would be in place and would be available for manufacturing needs. The new joint Chinese company team would be welcomed to participate in the management team; therefore, human resources, the financial department, marketing, and planning would all be organized by

both sides, and most of the Chinese partner members initially would be positioned at lower levels. Technologies would be also shared by the joint partners. Returnees were welcomed to work in these joint venture companies due to their technical and linguistic advantages.

The Chinese market is gargantuan, and the number of potential customers from Japan, Europe, and the United States would be attractive to advanced countries; besides, the relatively cheap cost of labor with acceptable quality was in China; at the beginning of China's opening, labor was very affordable when compared with other regions. The slogans were that "China will use its market to exchange the technology": to draw, pull, or introduce the new technology; to adopt or absorb the new technology; and to develop indigenous capability or modify to produce newer technology. Learning from others is a good way for indigenous or self-development. But it will create an image of copycats. It is normal to learn from others, but without a proper management of intellectual property rights (IPR) China would easily receive complaints and global penalties.

Starting from 2008, there were more than seven thousand research experts from foreign countries conducting shared research projects with Chinese research and development (R&D) organizations or universities. Still, the gaps have been enormous, and indigenous efforts have been needed. By 2018, the trade war between the United States and China showed that China is still very behind in the high technology of, among other things, computer chips, airplane jet engines, and integrated circulate (IC) chips. The trade war suddenly awoke many Chinese people to notice that China has a heavy shortage of agriculture technology and products. The food demand of 1.4 billion people is a big challenge; in case worldwide bad weather causes serious shortages, then there would be no possibility to buy food, and this would be a disaster for China.

Returnees are expected to generate outstanding contributions to new fields and new technology, and this fact causes great stress and pressure, for comparatively few people (10 million returnees out of 1.4 billion, the population of China) would receive the chance for advanced education in foreign countries. Most of their family members, friends, or neighbors were great supports and thus expect performance and achievement.

Dissimilar Social and Cultural Structures

In the early stages of Chinese Communist society, especially during the Cultural Revolution, terms were used to separate people in two groups: “the red five groups,” membership in which was identified by three generations (if one’s grandfather and father were peasants, factory workers, military personnel or soldiers, or the proletariat), and “the black five groups,” which meant the three previous generations were landlords, rich peasants, counterrevolutionaries, rightists, or others who were considered bad elements. Those in “the black five groups” were considered much less worthy than “the red five groups”; during the Cultural Revolution, even a wrong book found in one’s house meant the whole family would be put into punishment groups.

Only members of the red five groups would be able to apply for Communist Party membership, which meant one would have much better opportunity to gain a better position for work and education, with a much brighter future. But the black five groups would receive punishment, only because, for example, one’s grandfather was a landlord.

If one of your relatives lived in a foreign country or region and still had connections, you would be acutely monitored, because the government thought that you might leak secrets to the outsiders; even the red group would need to build good relationships with any government

department. It would be a blessing if opportunities would be opened for you; therefore, people were eagerly building their social relationships, because authorities held most of power of permission in their hands.

This is an invisible pressure for everyone, even today. It is important to stand in the right group, and the different groups of people may never get along well, for no one wants to be labeled as part of wrong groups. Returnees face these kinds of pressure when they work in this different social structure and culture.

The culture is such that people cannot trust each other, but they need to share benefits and opportunities, and when one is trying to win friendship with higher-level officers, bribery scandals often occur. In any group, the higher-level officers often require new members to be involved in their scandals, or they may even force all the team members to fall into the same scandal situations. Any leaked messages could cause all to be damaged. And the most important rule is that one must be very careful about what one says in a public environment. For example, in an office meeting, it is not proper to say something against government announcements or the weakness of a policy of the country. Even if a person is asked to give some evaluation or policy suggestions, the management team probably wants to test the person's real point of view.

Christian returnees need to demonstrate the Christian life from one's love of God and neighbors. It is important not to judge, blame, or criticize others. Instead, Christians need to focus on love for God and neighbors, and to share one's faith in privacy, in one-on-one testimony. A reborn life is like a lamp which shines by itself, and one's good deeds attract and draw people to the Christian and to Jesus eventually.

Internal Factors and Challenges

Different Expectations of Personal Value and Status

The first question that every Chinese Christian returnee will face when going back to China (either from himself or from friends and family), normally will be, “Why did you not stay in a foreign country?” Behind the question is a negative idea about the returnee: he or she is not able to find a job in foreign country or is not good enough to survive in the foreign country. When this happens, how will returnees answer the question and face old classmates, previous teachers, or one’s relatives? And how will returnees talk to themselves?

In a foreign country, such as the United States, every year new job offers and new working opportunities provided or generated by advanced foreign countries remain almost at a similar number. However, the numbers of new Chinese graduates (master’s degrees or doctorates) are increasing rapidly. The new graduates may stay one or two years more in foreign countries and find a job, but it will become more and more difficult for companies, which will accurately calculate the cost and earnings. Many companies are not able to offer an official work position or to say it will help the foreigner to apply for a green card or a residence permit. By contrast, in China the high-tech companies are looking for new experts who already possess experience in the new technologies.

In addition, the expectations of one’s achievement or status, the title on one’s business card, one’s position in a company, one’s achievements, and people’s praise could generate an atmosphere that would form huge pressure and stress. Many Christian returnees find that they need strength and energy to survive for basic needs, since many of their parents are not Christians. A returnee might wonder, What is your Christian value? What is your meaning in life? It will be easy to find a sound, standard answer, but a mature Christian’s growth needs time

and guidance; for many Chinese Christian returnees, not only do their parents and family not know Christ, but also many family members seriously oppose the returnee's Christian faith and belief.

There are no support resources from previous church members who are far away in foreign countries, and it would be disgraceful to mention any of this when talking to friends who expect all is well. Returnees would be concerned about how people look at them; the value system in a new Christian's heart could fall short without a mentor's support on site. The Lord Jesus Christ always stayed and lived with his disciples daily, and the apostle Paul always maintained close relationships with Timothy and the churches. It is important for Christians to have supportive mentors to build close relationships and establish Christian leaders' faith gradually, even at a distance.

Strong Social and Market Competition

Chinese parents wish to be very proud of their children, and those who can study overseas for their advanced education are of high value for parents. This attitude perhaps is caused by the fact that China was closed for many years, and when China opened again all the people deeply admired the progress of foreign countries. The returnees' relatives and neighbors would be proud of them and hold high expectations.

Before 2000, most of the people who had chances to study outside of China would necessarily need to receive scholarship awards, and many of them were top students in China. Almost no families could afford the tuition and lodging costs for studying abroad, and many parents needed to borrow money for the first air tickets and expected their children would repay the debt someday.

By 2019, job opportunities in China for returnees have been very competitive. By the end of 2018, the number of returnees was calculated to be 3,651,400 (from 1980 to 2018). In 2018 alone, more than half a million returnees went back to China. The number of college graduates in China was more than 8.34 million in the summer of 2019. They were all outstanding students and young. This fact means returnees face increased competition for work. But different fields of study are paid differently; majors in engineering, economics, and science in China would get higher salaries and have the top employment rates. The highest-paid positions are the sectors of information technology, finance, real estate, and operations; Chinese tech graduates do particularly well (e.g., biochemistry). A person's field of expertise is now becoming one important factor in the competition.

In China, one's social relationships are important. Without a strong family background, one needs to develop one's social networks, and for these reasons scandals occur. Officers in higher positions expect gifts in exchange for opportunities. First it is required that one performs well in one's field, but also people need to demonstrate they can get along well with the team, that bosses are satisfied with work well done and sound relationships with others.

Many Christian returnees are under strong pressure, for a sound job is not easy to get; after the world economic crisis in 2008, a good number of Chinese left foreign countries, mainly the United States. In addition, it is not easy to find another Christian in China to marry, for those married couples were most likely to have younger children. If a Christian returnee wishes for a better salary or a higher position, he or she will face challenges and pressure.

Adapting to Different Church Styles

After 1949, all missionaries left China, and during the Cultural Revolution, churches were closed, Bibles were burned, and pastors were put into jails, but the underground churches were still sharing the gospel. People memorized the Bible and copied by hand several books of the Bible to share. In 1978, the new leader after the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), Deng Xiaoping, visited the United States, and English teachers and professionals from foreign countries were welcomed to China. Also, many missionaries then re-entered China with titles other than that of missionary. On the campuses of Chinese colleges, they were spreading the Christian faith and were very successful. The number of young Christians increased rapidly.

In 2017, new Chinese religious regulations were announced.⁴ The new city churches and house churches are required to be officially registered by the government and under supervision; otherwise, the churches would be disbanded and considered illegal gatherings. The sermons and programs of the three-self churches would be monitored and supervised; the pastors would be asked to pass required interviews before the issue of preaching licenses. Before 2020 the churches in China had been divided into small cells, but now the church is an online virtual gathering.

Church management style is different, as many are more centralized (e.g., the senior pastor is a typical leader, and he is the center of a church). Churches compete with one another on the number of congregations; the size of church buildings, including the cross on the top of the sanctuary; the wealth of a church; and the number of people who are baptized in a year. Many deemphasize evangelical mission but focus on the internal affairs within the churches.

4. Chinese Communist Party, “China’s Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Beliefs,” April 3, 2018, accessed October 4, 2021, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1626734/1626734.htm>.

One of the most serious challenges for Christian returnees is that the Chinese government asks returnees to take an oath that they have no any religious belief (that is, abandon one's faith in Christ) if their companies are related to the government: teachers and professors in universities, education organizations, any industry or business that is related to government, research organizations, and medical organizations, including hospitals with all workers and medical doctors. Because China is a very centralized country, it has less opportunity for people to work in a private company, and even if a company is a private company, there must be a Communist Party-organized group, and they monitor all the people who return from foreign countries.

Christian returnees would need great faith to prepare to be as wise as serpents to face earthly persecutions for the faith. That is tremendously difficult, and only those who are equipped and fully prepared will be able to deal with it. With good spiritual parents one may remain in the faith and stand firm. It is extremely hard for outsiders to understand the pressure that Christian returnees deal with. If a returnee is not mature enough, he or she will easily fall. Only God would release the pressure from inside, and Christians from outside need to remember the brothers and sisters and pray earnestly for them.

Christian returnees are short of nutritious spiritual food to grow so that they will love to share their faith with others. But many returnees feel exhausted. They will need support from mature spiritual parents who will encourage them to grow continuously in faith.

New Family Expectations

Since 1981, China has had a policy that only one child was allowed for each couple. Starting on January 1, 2016, all Chinese couples can have two children. This marks the end of

China's one-child policy, which for thirty-five years has caused most Chinese families to have only one child. Christian returnees mostly come from one-child families.

There were advantages and disadvantages for this generation. The disadvantage is that there is no other brother or sister in a nuclear family, so the child would be lonely and isolated when growing up. This is especially true in rural areas, for parents both might start to work in city factories to make money for a better life (e.g., to build a better house), but their child would be left in the countryside to grow up with their grandparents. It is often found that children love to talk to themselves; they have less opportunity to learn how to build relationships with others and can easily become self-centered, with decreased communication skills. They have fewer friends to talk with and possess lower social capabilities. However, the advantages were that the parents would pay more attention to this only child, gender is much less important (as in Chinese tradition, people would prefer to have a male child for the purpose of inheritance), and resources would be greater than in previous generations. Public education is more available for every child, and the teachers can pay more attention to each student.

As a result, the parents and family have high expectations of this only child. In Chinese tradition, the child has the obligation to take care of elderly parents and grandparents. Since the father and mother were also under the one-child policy, their only child would be expected to support and take care of four grandparents and parents—altogether, six older members of the family would need to be taken care of later.

In China's official regulations, if an older person is begging on the street, the younger family members would be charged by the police, and a penalty ticket would be given. (This is why people seldom meet a beggar on the street, for the social security system is different.) It is against the law to ignore this, and it is the responsibility of young family members to take care of

older family members. One's social value and reputation would be atrocious, and friends would look down upon someone who did not care for elderly family members; however, if people make it a priority to take care of parents and family members, society will praise them. This also shows how people are immensely reluctant to move to nursing homes, because it can indicate a child does not have a good heart to take care of the elderly. It would cause a consequential problem because family responsibility is a high-evaluation checkpoint in Chinese society.

Expensive kindergartens and costly dual-language education (in middle and high schools) are very difficult to enter. The number of students and resources are unequal, and that imbalance has caused extreme stress for returnees as parents to fight for their children. One of the goals for Christian returnees as parents would be to support their children with maximized opportunity and plenty of resources.

Course 4: What Are Chinese Religious Regulations and the Five-Year Plan?

From 2016 to 2020, China's education sector made progress. The Ministry of Education (MOE) said at a press conference on December 23, 2020, that more than 2.5 million Chinese students studied abroad between 2016 and 2019, and 80 percent of these students returned to China after completing their programs. In 2020, the MOE had received more than 300,000 applications for credential evaluation and recognition from students studying overseas. The evaluation is necessary for one to apply for a new job in China. Students would receive a kind of certificate to prove the study is real, which university the person attended, and the courses selected. The number of applications has been raised about 10 percent (30,000) in 2019. The MOE is encouraging more students to return to China from overseas, for China will improve the

quality of services, create more favorable job positions, and encourage entrepreneurs to offer more opportunities.⁵

Several Christian organizations estimated how many Chinese overseas students converted to Christianity. The estimates varied, but it is from 5 percent to 10 percent. This means that of 2.5 million Chinese students, 80 percent (2 million) of whom return to China, the number of Christian returnees would be 100,000 to 200,000. Yet large numbers of converts seem to have lost their faith after coming back to China. Volunteers and missionary staff who have worked for years with Chinese students in the United States estimate that “80 percent of believers eventually stop going to church after returning home.”⁶ It generally takes time for the returnees to find suitable places in China. Many are still searching for rules and appropriate behaviors so they can merge into the rapid economic and social changes. Another point is that current Chinese churches are operating under new rules of control, as China, officially communist, is an atheist state.⁷ The number of lost-faith Christian returnees (LFCR) then will be calculated as 80,000 to 160,000. This would be a tremendous loss, but the salvation of God will never fail. Jesus told the parable of the sower: some seeds fall on rock, some are eaten by the birds, some stop growing in a harsh environment. Nonetheless, the shepherd has ninety-nine sheep already, but he will not abandon the one which gets lost. How should we react to the demand to save and help the lost ones?

5. Huaxia, “China’s Education Goes International from 2016 to 2020,” Xinhua, China Daily, December 23, 2020, accessed September 21, 2020, http://english.www.gov.cn/statecouncil/ministries/202012/23/content_WS5fe27ba8c6d0f72576942539.html.

6. Zhang, “Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home.”

7. Zhang, “Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home.”

External Factors

Changes in social values

In 1976, many Chinese Communist Party leaders passed away, and the Cultural Revolution came to an end. In 1978, China started to reopen and to restart university entrance exams. In 1992, opening was extended, and foreign companies began to be able to enter Chinese markets. In 2001, China entered the World Trade Organization, learning how to manage and define regulations for most industries and how to do business and manage the country's finances. In 2008, the Beijing Olympic Games helped China to rebuild this old city. Also in that year, China experienced a serious earthquake. In response, all the provinces supported one another and a collaborative style in the whole country led to good outcomes. In 2018, economic war began between the United States and China, which made China recognize that the foundations of multiple technologies needed to be built up. In 2021, the One Belt One Road initiative, a huge project of a new Silk Road, was redefined and enhanced. Chinese who were born in different time frames have been deeply affected by the changes in social status around them. For example, 800 million people in Mainland China have seen improvements from a very poor status. In forty years, from 1979 to 2019, China's economic growth has increased rapidly. Every ten years marks a new generation for the children; therefore, these generations have made themselves quickly adapt to different social regulations and standards. Thus, the value system has been changed relatively fast as well.⁸

8. Huaxia, "China's Education Goes International from 2016 to 2020"; Chinese Communist Party, "China's Policies and Practices on Protecting Freedom of Religious Beliefs," white paper, April 3, 2018, accessed September 3, 2019, <http://www.scio.gov.cn/zfbps/32832/Document/1626734/1626734.htm>; J. Li and L. Zhao, "The Costs of Socializing with Government Officials: A New Measure of Corporate Political Connections," *China Journal of Accounting Research* 8 (2015): 25-39, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.cjar.2014.10.003>.

There were many conflicts in the past owing to different social standards, and older people always needed to catch up to the new technologies, new regulations, and new values. Most Chinese returnees were born after 1976, so when they went back, they all needed to redefine themselves: How will I play a proper role to merge into the current social structures?

Different church styles

There are mainly two kinds of Christian churches in China. One is called three-self churches, which indicates that the church has self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation; the government requires transparency, and the churches need to follow the guidance of the government. The other is called house churches, which remain illegal for not going through a proper registration process. There are requirements for registration from the government that are not biblical or reasonable.

This struggle started in 1949, after the new country first formed. The Chinese Communist Party demanded all foreign missionaries leave the country and forbade churches to receive financial support from other countries, since the party members considered that churches can form a great power against the government.

Returnees who have experienced Western-style church settings often have difficulties integrating into the churches in China. And the churches are very different, in that the structure of house churches is quite centralized; normally, the senior pastor has authority to oversee almost everything. Many returnees have the intention to change this structure, which has caused many problems. Some Chinese pastors are forbidden to engage with the returnees due to their much higher level of education. One of the issues is that some teachings were not accurate enough, and

the sheep found not enough spiritual food. This is not to mention that some workers violate the biblical principles on handling wealth or even committing adultery.⁹

Workplace pressure

When the returnees come back to China, usually they already have some connections in China, but those who need to find jobs after they land in China will face rigorous situations. China is a very relationship-related society, so if one does not have strong relationship bonds, one would not easily find a job, even in many foreign branch offices. One's resume would be useful for an introduction by a friend, a relative, or a classmate. Companies usually have some candidates for interviews already available. This is totally different from the United States or another foreign country. When one successfully enters a job, the competition starts, and the performance pressure can drive one into a very difficult situation. One interview with a returnee said, "Theoretically, we should prioritize God over everything else, but real-life scenarios often don't permit that."¹⁰

Family expectations

Family is crucial in a Chinese person's lifetime. Tradition encourages a person to never ignore relatives' concerns. Family reputation would drive a Chinese to realize that there is a need to be good or outstanding, and not to be considered blameworthy in relationships (e.g., within the family, such as uncles, or outside of the family, such as a boss). Parents are proud when their

9. Xin Wang, "Uncertainty for Chinese Students in the United States," January 2, 2021, accessed September 22, 2021, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org>; Zhang, "Chinese Converted Out West Losing Faith at Home."

10. X. Yan, "Chinese Values vs. Liberalism: What Ideology Will Shape the International Normative Order?", *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* (2018): 1-22, Doi: 10.1093/cjip/poy001, <http://academic.oup.com/cjip/article-abstract/11/1/1/4844055>.

children get opportunities to receive advanced education in foreign countries. Nonetheless, when a person finishes the training and comes back to China, the first questions people ask would be, “Why came back? Could not find a job there? Can’t make big money? Are you married?” There is a tone in these questions, and it can make a person lunatic. Especially for those whose parents are unbelievers, the conflicts would cause issues within a family.

China’s one-child policy started in the 1980s, and most of the current returnees are in this age range. The only child receives support from all members of the family: not only parents, but also both sets grandparents and even other relatives all contribute to one’s advanced education (including air fare, tuition, costs of living), and they naturally have expectations of one’s achievement. One will not easily to ignore the expectations and concerns.¹¹

Internal Factors

Values and beliefs

Christians value God’s point of view, and the meaning of their lives would rely on the teachings of God through the Bible and the Holy Spirit. But the world’s values would be introduced through media, through all the channels and platforms; fashion; and an emphasis on individuality. People all around would challenge one’s biblical beliefs. One would not stand if he or she dares not to fight back. If one cannot demonstrate his or her beliefs in daily life, it is easy to lose the spiritual war.¹²

11. Yan, “Chinese Values versus Liberalism”; Y. Kun and C. D. Berliner, “Chinese International Students in the United States: Demographic Trends, Motivations, Acculturation Features and Adjustment Challenges,” *Asia Pacific Education Review* 12 (2011): 173-84.

12. YWAM, “Generation Z—Shocking Statistics about Beliefs and Sexuality,” 2019, accessed August 16, 2019, <http://www.billionbibles.com/generation-z.html>; Li and Zhao, “The Costs of Socializing with Government Officials.”

Life goals

God has a plan for everyone, and the plan is designed for a lifetime on earth. God's plan builds us to be his witnesses on earth; the reality for returnees to China is that they would be attacked fiercely according to the world's standards and might struggle to live a life that God wants. If the returnee is one person alone, it would be more difficult to survive under these pressures. Therefore, Jesus sent out his disciples using a two-by-two strategy, and a good mentor would support a returnee who feels alone.¹³

Current Religious Regulations on Christians in Chinese House Churches

Mainland China adopted the materialism of Marxism, the ideology of which was that a sound society led to a harmonious world. China practiced the theory by conducting People's Communes, which meant the collectivization of agriculture. However, the theory ended as a disaster in communist Russia around 1930 and in China in the 1950s. Marxism does not recognize that a human being is a creation of God. During China's Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), all religions were forbidden, all the churches were closed, and all temples were closed, because Marxism is atheistic. But the underground house churches were booming during this period. The gospel of God cannot be seized by authority.

Today in China, Communist Party members are asked to swear that they believe in no religion. Teachers, from all grades in school up to university professors, or medical doctors of any kind, even bankers, are asked to sign a paper to declare that they believe in no religion. This policy extends to all the transportation drivers who work for the government, for the government supervises all these public organizations.

13. Wang, "Uncertainty for Chinese Students in the United States."

After China's reopening in 1978, the pressures on religion have been relieved gradually; in 2001, the city house churches started to build. Unfortunately, when the churches grew to a degree, some problems began to occur. In 2017, the huge crosses were torn down in many churches, and all pastors fell into persecution. There was a need of being united, and pastors' prayer meetings started to be organized. But before that happened, the churches competed with one another in terms of property and the number of congregations. The city house churches were competing for the wrong indicators, and the government restrictions helped clean the wrongdoings of the city house churches.

The new regulations on religion were issued in 2018, the main sections of which are listed below. The purpose for this long post is to prevent incorrect interpretation of what the government says in its official document:

Freedom of religious belief is protected by the Constitution. According to Article 36 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, "Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. No State organ, public organization or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion." Article 36 also stipulates that "No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the educational system of the State," and that "Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign control." These stipulations serve as the constitutional basis for the State in protecting citizens' freedom of religious belief, administering religious affairs in accordance with the law and building positive relations with and among religions. Freedom of religious belief is protected by basic laws. China's Criminal Law, National Security Law, and Counter-Terrorism Law provide for the protection of citizens' freedom of religious belief. The principle of equal protection for all Chinese citizens is enshrined in the Election Law of the National People's Congress and Local People's Congresses, Organic Law of the People's Courts, Organic Law of the People's Procuratorates, Organic Law of the Urban Residents Committees, Organic Law of the Villagers Committees, Criminal Procedure Law, Education Law, Labor Law, Employment Promotion Law, and Trade Union Law. These laws stipulate that all citizens enjoy equal rights to vote and stand for election to people's congresses at all levels and to community-level self-government organizations, the right to equality before the law, the right to education, the right to work and to free choice of employment, and the right to join or organize trade unions in accordance with the law, irrespective of religious belief. The Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy states that organs of self-government in ethnic

autonomous areas shall guarantee citizens of all ethnic groups the freedom of religious belief. According to the Law on the Protection of Minors, minors enjoy equal rights to life, development, protection, participation, and education in accordance with the law, irrespective of their religious belief. The Advertisement Law prohibits any advertisements that contain any information that discriminates against religions. The Criminal Law stipulates that worker of State organs involved in serious cases, which illegally deprive citizens of their right to freedom of religious belief, shall be investigated for criminal responsibility. The General Provisions of the Civil Law states that a lawfully established place of worship qualifying as a legal person may register for the status of legal person to accept donation.¹⁴

Despite the views of any human government, as God reigns in all situations, the gospel will be shared to the end of the world. Jesus will be coming back again to a new page.

The Chinese Five-Year Plan (FYP)

In March 2021, China’s National People’s Congress (NPC) and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) met to set socioeconomic and political priorities and approve China’s fourteenth Five-Year Plan (FYP) (2021–2025). Major themes included

Prioritizing the quality of growth rather than the quantity of growth

Building China into a self-reliant technological and manufacturing powerhouse

Accelerating the drive towards a low-carbon economy to help achieve the 2030/2060 climate goals

Achieving “common prosperity” through new rural revitalization and urbanization strategies

Moving ahead with gradual liberalization of the business environment

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Hiroki Takeuchi, "Domestic Politics of Chinese Foreign Policy: Where Will Xi Jinping Bring China?" *Asian Security* 15, no. 2 (2019): 205-13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2019.1594782>.

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Course 5: What Will Be Good Ways to Support Overseas Chinese Christians?

Chinese overseas students who converted as new believers increased rapidly from 1990 to 2000. After 2001 the number of new students increased very quickly, and those younger generations are very different from the previous generations. Many of them are more independent and financially self-sufficient, because with more Chinese students on a campus, they organize their own activities. But some of them still need part-time jobs to support their daily life. They are the generations born after 1978, when the Cultural Revolution in China ended. They have grown up in booming economic times, but the mission is the same: people still need love, peace, and joy in their heart.

These young overseas Chinese Christians will be the main structure of Chinese society in the next fifteen to forty-five years, and one may reasonably presume that God has sent them to foreign countries to observe the world outside of China. However, 80 percent of these converted Christian returnees do not continue to go to church, for which there are external and internal reasons. Yet these potential future Christian leaders are worth an investment in time and teaching, and those candidates will also be training future leaders according to their special talents.

According to the author's discussions with several pastors or elders in conferences, in North America alone there are more than fifteen hundred Chinese churches (2019), and from 65

to 95 percent of these congregations were formed by people who came from Mainland China. This is a great milestone and a remarkable miracle of God. Another reality is that the numbers of Chinese overseas students are enormous, and North American Chinese churches or Chinese Christian organizations are not yet forming an effective way to handle evangelical outreach to these huge numbers. Many North American Chinese churches lack manpower and strength, as well as compassion, to give time to support consultation. Besides, outreach is not a high priority for the churches, for the churches are already very busy, with tight schedules.

One possible strategy is to train young Christian leaders to spread the gospel among the students, and when they go back to China, they will stand firm and act as good servants of the Lord Jesus Christ. After they go back to China, they will receive support from long-distance spiritual parents.

The “Train the Trainers” Project Design

For the “Train the Trainers” project, the trainer candidates are overseas Chinese Christian seniors who are well-educated, with professional work experience, familiar with Bible truth, and speak Chinese. Above all, they are spiritually mature, full of life experience, and have time available because they are retired.

Nonetheless, most of them did not grow up in Mainland China, which means they have very limited understanding of the changes in China since 1949. Therefore, it will be necessary to provide enough information about China for them. One attempt of this author is to provide a set of courses to fulfill the gaps, along with motivating the seniors to get out of their comfort zone. How will they act as mentors (spiritual parents) with the love of Christ? It will heavily depend on

God's calling, and the mentor's role is a long-term relationship with the mentee, following the pattern of "to train the trainers" (2 Tim 2:2).

By contrast, when the returnees go back to China, they are unfamiliar with the churches' situation and styles. Owing to rapid changes in China, they will need to prepare themselves in different ways which will help them to fit in quickly, but the North American Chinese churches are not fully aware of some changes. For example, in Beijing there are new city churches and house churches, which all were forced to close in 2019. Only the three-self churches can function under stringent government regulations. A current observation (2019) is that many new city churches and house churches could divide only into small cell gatherings. The good news is that evidence has shown that evangelical mission has not stopped but has only transformed into different ways. The mission is the same: to spread the gospel.

This thesis-project has adopted the pattern of Jesus and his disciples, as well as Paul and Timothy. The disciples study and learn from their mentor.

Vision

The growth of a mature Christian needs time, and it is important to have a mentor to guide one for a long time to make sure that growth is stable and to prevent hurt. Therefore, the idea of "flying a kite from a distance" is formed. When someone is flying a kite, the wire is in one's hand, and the kite will operate against the wind. The kite can freely fly high and far in the sky because the supportive connection is always there. It can be a metaphor of Christians living by the holding, supporting hand of God. For returnees, it is likely they will fly against winds when they return to China; the returnees are not only easily isolated by their surroundings, including parents who are unbelievers, new friends, and even old friends. Also, the job

competition, new requirements, and new regulations can easily drag a young Christian down, and he or she has no one to talk to or receive help and support.

The loss of Christian returnees who are not fully equipped before going back to China, mainly due to a short period of time to grow while they study in foreign countries, is ever a possibility. Most of the overseas Chinese churches are not aware of their needs, the challenges they will face, and the difficulties ahead. The churches do not have follow-up plans and action. After returning to China, it seems to be a kind of forsaking—the returnees are to face the new challenges by themselves.

Mission

The mission for this thesis-project is to build up the returnees as faithful, independent Christian leaders and to establish long-term relationships with their mentors in the United States. The lessons learned from previous times are that young Christian returnees were not ready and equipped enough when they went back to China to face the challenging environments of work, family, and social culture. During their journey of growth, the spiritual parents (mentors) will support and accompany them to overcome the difficulties.

Objective

As a trial project, ten mentors will be assigned to and practice with ten potential young Chinese Christian leaders (a matching meeting and a six-visit program). It also can be done while the student is attending North America Chinese churches, and a collection of hands-on experiences can be devised for those who already did this practices. A series of training courses for the mentor candidates will be conducted to see whether the results are practical. After

training, evaluation and modification will be done; After the thesis-project, in the future from Boston to the Northeast, to the entire United States, and then worldwide, the overall expectation is to train four thousand potential young Chinese Christian leaders in ten years. There may be more than twenty thousand qualified Christian mentors in North America, but it will need God's calling to move them out of their comfort zone. Current Chinese restrictions on Christians to share the gospel are a motivation for this "Train the Trainers" project.

Strategy

The strategy is to build connections and to motivate mature senior Chinese Christians to be spiritual parents. This relationship is like flying a kite from a distance, as the returnees will be in China somewhere. Or it can be compared with an airplane pilot. After significant training, the new pilot will be able to fly independently. The spiritual parents act as family members, for long-term relationships can be built and trust gained. After the mentee is successfully involved and merged in the local church in China, the mentors' role will be as a supporter and the local Chinese churches will be mainly taking care of the growth of the potential future leaders.

A Christian leader's growth will take at least several years according to a planned, intensive program of about ten thousand hours. Young leaders will be able to reach maturity—that is, they will be reborn Christians who develop their gifts and leadership skills. A sound Christian lifestyle can be observed, and as a pattern, both mentors and young leaders will follow the example of the Lord Jesus Christ and his disciples, and the apostle Paul with Timothy and the churches.

The mature Christians are fifty-five and older, highly educated (this fact will attract students), have sound working careers, and will have served the churches intensively in the past. Their experiences have been built for at least twenty to thirty years.

The goal of this research is trying to find a mentor-mentee practice which may be able to build an effective Chinese Christian discipleship way for overseas Chinese Christians. In this research, the first group of people acts as mentees—the people who are students or young adults and converted as Christians while they did their advanced study in North America.

Unfortunately, quite a few of them lost their faith to Christ when they went back to China;¹⁵ in this research, this group of people is called “lost faith Christian returnees” (LFCR). One possible solution for this phenomenon would be promoting the second group of people, called “senior retired Chinese Christians” (SRCC), to act as mentors—the people who came to North America for advanced study during the 1950s through the 1980s and gained higher education degrees. After graduation, many of them worked in sound jobs and experienced different fields in North America for many years. They normally possessed and generated good work records. Now they are retired (age sixty and over) and at this time are physically healthy. One outstanding point is that they have multiple experiences, so that they could communicate remotely (through a website) with people around the world and provide advice and guidance.

The designated mentor candidates (SRCC) originally may come mainly from Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, or southeast Chinese Christian communities (for those who came from Mainland China as early as 1980, their relatives and family members are still under the restricted environment). They used the same Chinese language; many of them involved themselves in the Chinese campus Bible study groups from the early years and later served in North American

15. Han Zhang, “Chinese Converted Out West Are Losing Faith Back Home,” *Foreign Policy*, January 26, 2017, accessed September 10, 2019, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/01/26/chinese-converted-out-west-are-losing-faith-back-home-christian-churches-study-abroad>.

Chinese churches (in 2019 there were more than fifteen hundred Chinese churches established in North America, even though there were very few in the 1960s). How can the SRCC become mentors or coaches to LFCR? The author's research question is "How can mature Chinese Christians living in America be trained as effective mentors or coaches (spiritual parents) for expatriate Chinese converts, including college students, preparing a return to China?" Thus, the mentor will be in a long-term service mode, and mentors or coaches will be asked to involve themselves in the areas of spiritual life, daily life, work ethic, and family issues of LFCR to offer guidance and support. When the mentees are successfully adapted into the local churches in China, the local churches will then take the main growth training role.

Mentoring, Discipleship, and Leadership

Originally, the word *mentor* is from the language of ancient Greek mythology and refers to one who is a counselor, sponsor, patron, godfather, or advisor.¹⁶ In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the word was often used to mean guidance for a young man to enter military service; later, some scholars found that mentorship is one of the most effective ways to develop young people's commitment and self-concept.¹⁷ As leaders are important in the modern world, how does one find a qualified leader, and how is a mature leader formed to handle the complexity and systemic problems of a situation? Will a leader be selected from inside or from outside? These questions have been discussed very broadly.¹⁸ The mentoring relationship usually

16. C. Dutton, "Mentoring the Contextualization of Learning—Mentor, Protégé, and Organizational Gain in Higher Education," *Education & Training* 45, no. 1 (2003): 22-29; M. Woodd, "Mentoring in Further and Higher Education: Learning from the Literature," *Education & Training* 39, nos. 8-9 (1997): 333-43.

17. C. R. Bell, "The Mentor as Partner," *Training & Development* 54, no. 2 (2000): 52-56; D. J. Levinson, C. N. Darrow, M. H. Levinson, and B. McKee, *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978).

18. W. Bennis, "The Challenges of Leadership in the Modern World," *American Psychologist* 62, no. 1 (2007): 1-5; C. M. Campbell, M. Smith, J. P. Dugan, and S. R. Komives, "Mentor and College Student Leadership

exists between an experienced older person and a less-experienced younger person.¹⁹ Often a mentor acts as a counselor and friend and provides a role model who is accepted by the mentee.²⁰ Scholars recognize that mentorship would help the mentee to define personal values, follow the model of leadership habits, and speed up the learning process.²¹

Mentoring is one of the oldest and best methods of learning.²² Smith considers the example of Pastor Raymond Charles Stedman (October 5, 1917–October 7, 1992), an evangelical Christian pastor and author. Stedman was a long-time pastor of Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto, California, and author of several books. He always had a few young staff who would travel together; by working, eating, learning, discussing, and observing together, they delineated the principles of the gospel. Another story is of the famous pianist Leonard Bernstein: a young man came to Bernstein and wished to become a mentee and learn from this top professional. When the young man initiated the contact, Bernstein said to him, “Tell me what you want to do, and I will tell you whether or not you’re doing it.” “You are responsible for your

Outcomes: The Importance of Position and Process,” *The Review of Higher Education* 35, no. 4 (summer 2012): 595-625; R. A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

19. E. C. Shapiro, F. P. Haseltine, and M. P. Rowe, “Moving Up: Role Models, Mentors, and the ‘Patron System,’” *Sloan Management Review* 19, no. 3 (1978): 51-58.

20. K. E. Kram, “Improving the Mentoring Process,” *Training and Development Journal* 39, no. 4 (1985): 40-43; K. E. Kram, *Mentoring at Work: Developing Relationships in Organizational Life* (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, 1988).

21. V. M. Godshalk and J. J. Sosik, “Does Mentor-Protégé Agreement on Mentor Leadership Behavior Influence the Quality of a Mentoring Relationship?,” *Group & Organization Management* 25, no. 3 (2000): 291-317; A. Kezar, *Rethinking Leadership in a Complex, Multicultural, and Global Environment: New Concepts and Models for Higher Education* (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2009); K. E. Kram and L. A. Isabella, “Mentoring Alternatives: The Role of Peer Relationships in Career Development,” *Academy Management Journal* 28 (1985): 110-32; S. D. Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000); M. Popper and R. Lipshitz, “Putting Leadership Theory to Work: A Conceptual Framework for Theory-Based Leadership Development,” *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 14, no. 7 (1993): 23-27; T. A. Scandura, M. J. Tejeda, W. B. Werther, and M. J. Lankau, “Perspectives on Mentoring,” *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 14, no. 7 (1996): 51-58.

22. F. Smith, “Mentoring That Matters: Reviving an Ancient Teaching Method That Adds Life to Ministry,” *Leadership* (winter 1999): 94-98, <https://www.Leadershipjournal.net>.

playing and your practice. The one thing you can't do is to hear yourself as a great pianist hears you." These examples show that mentoring is an everyday, living relationship between the mentor and mentee, with progress and practices to which both sides agree and will follow. The relationship will break when one side does not fulfill the agreement.

One of the best examples of mentoring is Jesus and his disciples. After Jesus' baptism, he was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil for forty days. In the Gospel of John, John the Baptist declared, "Behold, the Lamb of God" (John 1:29-51), and two disciples of John the Baptist followed Jesus. In the Gospel of John the initial contact seems to have been made by the disciples, yet in the other Gospel accounts (Matt 4:14-22; Mark 1:16-20; Luke 5:1-11), calling the first disciples seems to have been initiated by Jesus. The most important thing is the mentoring needs to be initiated by the mentor or the mentee.

The leadership style of Jesus is to "Follow me!" Jesus empowered and authorized his disciples. Jesus demonstrated, the disciples observed and practiced, and Jesus gave them strengths and capabilities when the Holy Spirit was sent to continue Jesus' teachings and guidance. After Jesus ascended to heaven to prepare places for us, and before Jesus' second coming, the Holy Spirit has been acting as mentor on behalf of Jesus. Therefore, Jesus is the lifetime mentor of all his disciples. The relationships are a long-term and a lifetime practice.

Today, to learn a skill or an art, normally the mentee will contact a professional who is a master in a specific area, such as a pianist or a carpenter. For example, in advanced education and academic areas, any master or doctoral student in a university needs a supervisor who is qualified by the university. He or she accepts the student's application, with both sides understanding the topics and goals. Then the process can be started. Normally, mentoring is a one-on-one practice and relationship.

Many churches have experienced a disciple training program, but these programs seldom result in satisfaction, for they are conducted to meet once a week for about two hours, and more end as a Bible study or prayer meeting. The program lasts for eight to twelve weeks, which is no different from other Sunday school programs. Because a mature Christian is built over time, there can be no shortcut or fast-food-style approach. As an orange tree needs to grow about three to four years or more before its first fruit appears, so every mentee needs time to practice and grow. For one specific skill, it requires at least ten thousand hours to be able to barely master the skill. For example, in Taiwan, a motorcycle troubleshooting mechanical engineer needs three and half years to live and to workday and night with the mentor before he becomes a master and is mature enough to practice troubleshooting independently.

How can one make a good match between the mentor and the mentee? There is no fixed formula, but several basic requirements and understanding would need to be in place:

- a. The mentor and mentee must share a compatible philosophy, and a good mentee grows by hearing unvarnished truth.
- b. The mentor should be knowledgeable in the subject and objective in his criticism, and the mentee works to ask the right questions.
- c. The mentor must genuinely believe in the potential of mentee, and a mentee must do his or her homework and climb to reach plateaus.
- d. A good mentor helps define the vision, the goal, and the plan; and a mentee would admit his or her ignorance.
- e. The chemistry must be good, and a mentee never tries to use his or her mentor.
- f. The mentor needs the experience and originality to develop options rather than decisions, and a mentee is to develop his or her character.

- g. The mentor must be able to commit to a person and to a situation, and a mentee initiates the request contact.
- h. The mentor must be given permission to hold the mentee accountable, joy in the doing, and mutual trust and confidence.²³

Compatible Philosophy and Growth through Unvarnished Truth

In this research project, both the mentors and the mentees should have a similar philosophy and belief, such as the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed, and have faith based on the Bible as God's Word, which is the most important source of Christian spiritual food. The Holy Spirit will teach us and remind us of what God has told us. Both mentor and mentee should confirm they are reborn Christians and fully follow the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

Both mentor and mentee will proclaim that the mission on earth is to share the gospel to the end of the world (Matt 24:14); the purpose of life on earth is to be a witness of the Lord (Acts 22:15); the meaning of life on earth is to live for the Lord as Christ lives within me (1 Thess 4:1); the strategy of life on earth is to love God with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength; and love others as myself (Luke 10:27); and the hope on earth is to be called as a faithful servant and be invited by God to share the same table with him in heaven (Matt 24:45; 25:21, 23).

One of the philosophies and principles of mentors and mentees is to believe that God would not do what people should do, and people should not try to be God. For when God created people on earth in his image, human beings already possessed the spirit, mind, and strength to do what should be done and do it efficiently and diligently. These mature believers should be the foundation from the beginning of the mentor and mentee relationships.

23. Smith, "Mentoring That Matters."

Knowledge and Objective Criticism and Asking the Right Questions

Mentoring is widely recognized as an exchange relationship that benefits the mentor and the mentee.²⁴ It is important for the mentee to obtain a mentor for enhancing one's early-career development,²⁵ and the mentor's study is also to be emphasized.²⁶

Most of the mentor candidates in this research were rewarded with advanced educational degrees. Not only are they knowledgeable, but also, they possess sound working experience gained through years of working in different fields. Besides, these SRCC have been involved in Bible study groups on campus while they were young, and later they were involved deeply in the development of Chinese churches in North America since the 1970s. During the period of building Chinese churches in North America, there were very few Chinese pastors; therefore, these mentor candidates participated in the Sunday sermons, Bible studies, youth group meetings, prayer meetings, and preparing Sunday lunches, as well as serving as babysitters or in other tasks. The result is that this group of people has been fully equipped and matured through hand-on work.

24. T. D. Allen, M. L. Poteet, J. E. A. Russell, and G. H. Dobbins, "A Field Study of Factors Related to Willingness to Mentor Others," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 50 (1997): 1-22; Kram, "Improving the Mentoring Process"; E. Mullen, "Framing the Mentoring Relationship in an Information Exchange," *Human Resource Management Review* 4 (1994): 257-81.

25. G. F. Dreher and R. A. Ash, "A Comparative Study of Mentoring among Men and Women in Managerial, Professional, and Technical Positions," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 75 (1990): 539-46; T. A. Scandura, "Mentoring and Career Mobility: An Empirical Investigation," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 13 (1992): 169-74; W. Whitely, T. W. Dougherty, and G. F. Dreher, "Relationship of Career Mentoring and Socioeconomic Origin to Managers' and Professions' Early Career Progress," *Academy of Management Journal* 34 (1991): 331-51.

26. S. Aryee, Y. W. Chay, and J. Chew, "The Motivation to Mentor among Managerial Employees," *Group & Organization Management* 21 (1996): 261-77; B. R. Ragins and J. L. Cotton, "Mentor Function and Outcomes: A Comparison of Men and Women in Formal and Informal Mentoring Relationships," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 84 (1999): 529-50; B. R. Ragins, J. L. Cotton, and J. S. Miller, "Marginal Mentoring: The Effects of Type of Mentor, Quality of Relationship, and Program Design on Work and Career Attitudes," *Academy of Management Journal* 43 (2000): 1177-94.

The disadvantageous factor of current mentor candidates is their low motivation to be mentors, as they are getting older, and after retiring with good pensions, they easily fall into the trap of staying in their comfort zone.

Human nature inclines people to get out of trouble or interferences in their accustomed daily schedule and activities. Moses is an example. When God's calling was revealed to him, Moses was reluctant to accept it but instead found many excuses for not taking the job. Often Christians' response, or lack of it, reflects what is recorded in Isaiah 6:8 (ESV): "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?'" But no matter what the response of a called person, God's plan and schedule never delay or change. One principle in the Bible is that God's plan will ask the participation of human beings to fulfill it; God's hand is not short, but his grace expects to bring more blessings to those who respond with obedience.

The mentor candidates are knowledgeable and mature in many areas, especially in the experiences of Christian life, and the mentees also are well educated. However, in China it will be difficult for LFCRs to find a right person to ask questions or get living guidance with family issues (e.g., couples' conversation techniques, childrearing problems, relatives' and parents' communication, difficulties in the workplace). China's society is a highly competitive environment, and Christians are not favored within the society, because the social value system and life meaning, as well as life purpose, are very different. The government sets many restrictions for religious gatherings which may be caused by the fear of why people are gathering—the fear is they might use force against the government. Besides, the Chinese house churches have their own style (e.g., authorized leadership), and the status of LFCRs is that many already have gained a higher education degree from foreign countries, and now LFCRs have returned to China, which has a very high social standard of achievement. Thus, the church

leaders often share different viewpoints to be different and secure their positions. It would be difficult for the LFCRs to find a suitable mentor for guidance of Christian life.

The mentees' characteristics have positive influence on the mentors' decision to develop a mentoring relationship. If an SRCC has some experiences of mentoring others in the past, it will help motivate those people to accept the role of mentor. Most of the research on the advantages of acting as a mentor has some conclusions. For example, Zey lists four benefits for a mentor: career enhancement, intelligence/information, an advisory role, and psychic rewards.²⁷ Mullen proposed the benefits are the personal satisfaction that comes from passing knowledge and skills on to others, exhilaration from the fresh energy provided by the mentee, improved job performance by receiving a new perspective from the mentee, loyalty and support from the mentee, and organizational recognition.²⁸ However, mentors also facing the costs that will be associated with the mentoring, including other people's jealousy, the time demand, the possibility of mentees' disloyalty, or failures of the mentee.²⁹

In this research, the mentors and the mentees are all Christians. The rewards of mentoring for both will focus on what will be the rewards from God, and they are different from the world's rewards. Christians should value that mentoring is from the love of God and follows God's commands. To receive God's confirmation as a faithful servant will be the best reward.

The subject and objective of this Christian mentoring research project is "To Train the Trainers" and "To share the gospel to the end of the world." The mentor candidates are well trained and have life experience and therefore should be qualified to be mentors to the LFCR.

27. M. G. Zey, *The Mentor Connection* (Homewood, IL: Dow Jones-Irwin, 1984).

28. Mullen, "Framing the Mentoring Relationship in an Information Exchange."

29. T. J. Halatin and R. E. Knotts, "Becoming a Mentor: Are the Risks Worth the Rewards?", *Supervisory Management* 27, no. 2 (1982): 27-29; B. R. Ragins and T. A. Scandura, "Gender Differences in Expected Outcomes of Mentoring Relationship," *Academy of Management Journal* 37 (1994): 957-71.

The LFCR are mainly young adults. The main reasons that they are unable to join local churches have to do with the churches, and they need only to find proper fellowship with proper seniors. The LFCR would not ask strange questions, and the pressures LFCR face are the many difficulties that the SRCC went through many years ago. Even the situations will be different, but basic problems and struggles will be solved together through faithful companionship.

The Potential of the Mentee and the Willingness to Work and Reach Plateaus

The willingness to be a mentor will be affected by choosing of a compatible mentee: what would attract mentors to mentees? There are two theories: the similarity-attraction paradigm and the social exchange theory.

The similarity-attraction paradigm posits that mentors will be attracted by those who are very much like themselves. They have a lot in common.³⁰ The similar areas will include personality, character, gender, race, and original countries (e.g., England, France, Asia, or Germany for languages), and the same social background, food styles, habits, different regions with special dialects, or religion. In addition, scientific research fields, technical involvement, or anything similar will make it easier to talk or share, and that will help conversation processes.

One possibility is to group the mentors as a team (e.g., two couples or one couple with one or two individuals with different genders and backgrounds). It is likely that more similarities will be covered, and two to four mentees as a small group will be able to observe others' performance to enhance everyone's perspectives.

30. D. Byrne, *The Attraction Paradigm* (New York, NY: Academic Press, 1971).

The social exchange theory of mentoring holds that everyone believes the rewards will be greater than the costs in time, energy, or other factors.³¹ This cost-benefit balance should be considered in the selection of mentees.³² It has been shown that mentees with high performance and with technical knowledge will be more attractive to mentors.³³ Other research found important factors that influenced the selection of mentees: the ability or potential of the mentee, and the willingness to learn.

In this research project, the mentor candidates (SRCC) are mainly very familiar with the language of Mandarin Chinese, Chinese cultural and traditional customs (e.g., Chinese Spring Festival [Chinese New Year], Chinese Autumn Festival [moon cake celebration]), but there are still some gaps and differences between the SRCC and LFCR in the areas of social systems, social value systems, educational background, and mindset. Therefore, for mentors and mentees to trust each other will be required for the mentoring practice. The concern of SRCCs for the well-being of the LFCRs will be one of the main motivations for mentoring. When Jesus saw a huge crowd, “he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (Matt 14:14, ESV). Without love, there will be no progress in anything. “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1 Cor 13:2, ESV).

What is the goal of the mentoring practice between SRCCs and LFCRs? The main purpose will be having the LFCR find a Christian home with spiritual parents and continue to grow in Christ’s love. And the SRCCs will be full of joy from serving the Lord, as they would

31. P. Blau, *Exchange and Power in Social Life* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1964); G. C. Homans, “Social Behavior as Exchange,” *American Journal of Sociology* 63 (1958): 597-606; J. W. Thibaut and H. H. Kelly, *The Social Psychology of Groups* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 1959).

32. J. D. Olian, S. J. Carroll, and C. M. Giannantonio, “Mentor Reactions to Proteges: An Experiment with Managers,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 43 (1993): 266-78.

33. Kram, *Mentoring at Work*.

spend time and energy with the LFCRs. Therefore, the SRCCs should have faith that the LFCRs will grow, follow God's Word, and do God's will accordingly.

Defining the Vision, Goal, and Plan and Admitting Ignorance

Mentoring others requires a great deal of time and energy. Much research indicates that mentoring will positively enhance the mentee's performance and growth in job satisfaction.³⁴ Mentors are seniors who have accumulated knowledge and wisdom that can be passed on to a more junior person. Similarity between the SRCCs and the LFCRs is important—for example, if both are or were in biomedical research, the SRCC will be much better able to give guidance or suggestions on workplace-related difficulties. Thus, the mentor will be better able to define a correct vision, goal, and plan for the mentee. If there are similar social backgrounds, that will help with suggestions about the local cultural customs, and if their families are from the same province, the special food styles will enhance communication. Although time can change many habits, a lot of customs and manners are still firmly kept in local society in China today.

Current young people wish to be able to openly discuss the issues they are facing daily, not to say the vision, goal, and plan, and in the past Chinese society would expect younger generations to obey parents, teachers, or bosses, no matter what. As the Chinese government has been transformed from military systems, it was used to receiving orders rather than expressing opinions. It is not allowed to ignore or go against orders from the higher-ranking persons in a

34. T. D. Allen, M. L. Poteet, and S. M. Burroughs, "The Mentor's Perspective: A Qualitative Inquiry and Future Research Agenda," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 51 (1997): 70-89; G. T. Chao, P. M. Walz, and P. D. Gardner, "Formal and Informal Mentorships: A Comparison on Mentoring Functions and Contrast with Non-Mentored Counterparts," *Personnel Psychology* 45 (1992): 619-36; E. A. Ensher, C. Thomas, and S. E. Murphy, "Comparison of Traditional, Step-Ahead, and Peer Mentoring on Proteges' Support, Satisfaction, and Perceptions of Career Success: A Social Exchange Perspective," *Journal of Business & Psychology* 15 (2001): 419-38; E. A. Fagenson, "The Mentor Advantage: Perceived Career/Job Experiences of Proteges versus Non-Proteges," *Journal of Occupational Behavior* 10 (1989): 309-20; S. Seibert, "The Effectiveness of Facilitated Mentoring: A Longitudinal Quasi-Experiment," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 54 (1999): 483-502.

military system. Therefore, these one-way communication habits should be changed gradually to more open environments. The contrasting phenomenon is that Generation Z goes too far sometimes, and they miss the chance to receive good advice. They just reject anything society tells them.

When a good match for a mentor and mentee is found, a more correct vision, goal, and plan will be defined. The similarities of the two sides will be much more important factors for the match of the mentoring relationship. Jesus' set the example in Mark 6:7 and Luke 10:1 of sending disciples two by two, which is effective in sharing the mission objective.

Thus, this research project is designed to have an SRCC mentoring team of two couples or one couple with one or two individuals, for the two by two support each other. As a company, two couples will provide more possibilities for similarity, and if a senior becomes a single, he or she will join one couple as a team as two-by-two small team. The LFCRs will also be generated as small teams. The maximum number of individuals is either six families or twelve adults. This will better cover time sharing and limitations on energy.

Good Chemistry and Not Taking Advantage of a Mentor

Mentoring is associated with a broad range of interests: behavioral, attitudinal, rational or emotional, relational, motivational, and career outcomes.³⁵ Mentoring is associated with positive behavioral outcomes; it is concerned about increasing desirable behavior and decreasing undesirable behavior.

35. Allen, Eby, Poteet, Lentz, and Lima, "Outcomes Associated with Mentoring Proteges"; C. M. Underhill, "The Effectiveness of Mentoring Programs in Corporate Settings: A Meta-Analytical Review of the Literature," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 68 (2006): 292-307.

Mentoring also is associated with positive attitudinal outcomes; it is expected that the mentees will develop positive attitudes toward the activities that they engage in with their mentors.

Mentoring is associated with positive rational or emotional outcomes; a mentor may listen and offer advice when mentees are stressed, or the mentor provides counseling on personal or job-related problems.³⁶

A mentor may also help the overall well-being of mentees by challenging their negative self-views,³⁷ which may enhance the mentees' self-confidence or self-esteem. Mentoring is associated with positive relational outcomes; the interpersonal relationship with parents' relatives, family members, and mentors may provide appropriate strategies to deal with interpersonal problems. A trusting, close relationship with a mentor may lead mentees to develop positive expectations about interpersonal relationships with others.

Mentoring is associated with positive motivational outcomes; the mentor may open mentees' eyes to different possibilities and motivate them to seek new experiences. A mentor may help mentees stay focused on a goal or tasks or help them redesign an achievable goal.

Finally, mentoring is associated with positive career outcomes. If the mentoring pair is in the same field of work, the mentor may introduce mentees to other contacts (e.g., letters of recommendation, a more detailed introduction to someone), as the mentor has more contacts and a reputation with friends who know each other. Hence, all persons will gain trust.

Some mentoring relationships have unhappy or unhealthy ends, which it caused by hurting the heart of a mentor. The reasons could be misconduct or wrongdoing in the

36. Kram, "Improving the Mentoring Process."

37. J. E. Rhodes, *Stand by Me: The Risks and Rewards of Mentoring Today's Youth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); J. E. Rhodes, "A Model of Youth Mentoring," in *Handbook of Youth Mentoring*, 30-43, ed. D. I. DuBois and M. J. Karcher (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005).

relationship. The mentor feels betrayed or used for mentee's benefit: for example, a mentee may present to the mentor a claim of serious and urgent need of money or support in an emergency, but the claim was a fraud. Or a mentee may write a letter that was not from the mentor, but it has been sent out on behalf of the mentor. In extreme cases, a mentee, acting from greed or jealousy, may engage in criminal behavior that may lead to the mentor losing money or reputation. Even when both sides have gone through many difficulties and gained trust in a close relationship, still things can happen. Only love and forgiveness can solve these kinds of problems.

Chemistry sometimes is not easily expressed, but everyone knows it is there. People may experience that with classmate—some of them become close friends, others would not; and in a classroom, a teacher would automatically favor some students and not treat all of them equally. These phenomena could be described people having chemistry.

Developing Options and Developing Character

The overall purpose of this research project is trying to develop Chinese Christian leaders. “To Train the Trainer” is the first principle. The LFCRs (mentees) are promising potential candidates for future Chinese Christian leaders because they have already experienced the love of Christ, and many have received Jesus as their Savior. Many of them attended Bible study classes and adult Sunday school courses while they were in foreign countries. They have also experienced struggles when they went back to China. Most of them received higher education degrees, and Chinese people will perceive this as having a good reputation. Through re-adoption of the new Chinese culture, they have received firsthand information of Chinese development and easily fulfill the government's new regulations. Not everyone was able to study

abroad in the past; only outstanding people would. Most of these LFCRs are intelligent and capable of doing tasks, and LFCRs need companies for their growth along the way.

The SRCCs in this research project are qualified mentors for the LFCRs. They were very well educated in North America; many of them have PhDs and more than twenty to thirty years of sound work experience in North America. These SRCCs experienced the development and establishment of Chinese churches since 1970, and even until now, they have been trained by God through on-the-job training. They can share Sunday sermons; conduct Bible study classes, prayer meetings, and committee meetings; prepare Sunday lunches; babysit; and visit needy families and sick people in the hospitals. There were no or very few Chinese pastors during that period. This is how they grew and developed themselves. Now they are retired and have time. While they were working, the demands were huge. They experienced time constraints, and even regret today they regret that they could not spend more time with their family, especially their children. They are now over sixty years old (some are around eighty) and are no longer actively involved in church ministries. This is not a good situation for their health, for the comfort zone is no comfort at all. Most of SRCCs are still healthy and available to be mentors. Because current ways of communication have changed dramatically, people are able to visit remotely as a normal way of communication. It will be easy talking face to face online.

Just as there are various coaches for an American football team, so this research project intends to develop a two-by-two small team mentorship practice. The purpose is to increase the similarity of the mentor-mentee matches. A one-on-one relationship will develop as the participants become closer to each other and the relationship matures. To gain deep trust will need time, and the hope is that this practice will demonstrate that it is a profound way to build leaders.

Commitment and Initiating Contact

Research shows that most effective way of increasing a mentee's efficiency and performance as a leader is to have been taught by a good mentor.³⁸

The objective of SRCCs is to commit to reinforcing values that enhance the ability of the LFCRs to be better leaders in the future. One important factor for leaders is their self-construal of their abilities to lead, and mentorship would serve as an important pathway to elucidate these goals.³⁹

A key point is that a relationship of trust between the mentor and the mentee will deeply impact the success or failure of building of a leader through the mentoring process. A good leader trainee as a mentee would engage himself by asking if his leadership techniques need to be improved, and the mentee always welcomes feedback, no matter if it is positive or negative. This feedback will accelerate his or her growth and will show greater commitment and earnestness in the mentee's job performance. Feedback is welcomed by the leader trainee as a mentee to determine if he or she is a candidate who can self-regulate and self-enhance. Confidence is a critical characteristic of a leader. Efficiency as a leader also requires psychological strength that will give a leader more flexibility and adaptability while facing challenges and situations.

38. L. T. Eby, T. D. Allen, S. C. Evan, T. Ng, and D. L. Dubois, "Does Mentoring Matter? A Multidisciplinary Meta-Analysis Comparing Mentored and Non-Mentored Individuals," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 72 (2008): 254-67; W. A. Gentry, T. J. Weber, and G. Sadri, "Examining Career-Related Mentoring and Managerial Performance across Cultures: A Multilevel Analysis," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 72 (2008): 241-53.

39. D. V. Day and M. M. Harrison, "A Multilevel, Identity-Based Approach to Leadership Development," *Human Resource Management Review* 17 (2007): 360-73; D. S. DeRue and S. J. Ashford, "Who Will Lead and Who Will Follow? A Social Process of Leadership Identity Construction in Organizations," *Academy of Management Review* 35 (2010): 627-47; S. T. Hannah, B. J. Avolio, F. Luthans, and P. D. Harms, "Leadership Efficiency: Review and Future Directions," *Leadership Quarterly* 19 (2008): 669-92; D. van Knippenberg, B. van Knippenberg, D. De Cremer, and M. A. Hogg, "Leadership, Self, and Identity: A Review and Research Agenda," *Leadership Quarterly* 15 (2004): 825-56.

There will be six suggested steps for conducting a leader training program within six months. (These steps can also be practiced in current Chinese churches in North America)

- a. Establish the basis of the mentor-mentee relationship (roles and expectations). After the matching process for two-by-two teams, the SRCC and the LFCR have already exchanged their vitas (educational background, fields of interest, work records) and know the results of character tests (understanding each other's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and trends; see the next section of this thesis-project). The mentee should write an essay about his or her expectations: what they hope to gain and the understanding of the mentor's requirements.
- b. Focus on the specific areas that the mentees have trouble or problems in daily life and leadership. Through discussion, mentors will analyze and help mentees to diagnose and find the root causes of the problems. The discussion should be centered on how to make changes, take charge as a leader, and resolve problems in the future. Mentee leaders should prepare the questions before the discussion with a two- to three-page essay.
- c. Focus on the mentees' personal development goals. The mentors will discuss methods and opportunities or alternatives to reach those goals and share the mentors' own experiences. The mentees will prepare a two- to three-page essay about their goals for discussion.
- d. Focus on how to lead effectively during tough moral or ethical circumstances. This conversation should focus on what kind of behaviors can be called good, and mentors will calm mentees and lead with wisdoms. The leader mentee will prepare some questions (two to three pages) for discussion.

- e. and f. Provide case discussions and time to share. For each time, mentors will select topics or events which will help for understanding a leader's proper responses and resolutions that will lead to a happy ending.

These six steps could happen for three months to six months. Each time is about an hour or two and depends on time arrangements. Website meetings (e.g., by Zoom) will go from two-by-two discussions and then one-on-one conversations. The expectation is that these sessions will produce growth on both sides.

Accountability and Joy and Trust

The overall purpose of this research project is to “Train the Trainer,” in other words, to train leaders who will be trainers so the evangelical mission will continue from generation to generation. Before SRCCs are given permission to hold LFCRs (mentees) accountable, a deeper understanding of each other's background will be required through an interview so that understanding will quickly land the relationship on solid ground. Two interview practices will be suggested to the mentors; this process will help the mentor to realize his or her role. When the mentor is accountable, he or she can then hold the mentee accountable.

Mentors need to understand their previous experiences of acting as a mentee or a mentor, or similar roles. What is the reason for accepting the challenge to be a mentor? What kind of experiences of the mentee or mentor role influenced his or her own life? What will be the challenges for a mentor? How will he or she handle new situations? What is the mentor's understanding of leadership and “To Train the Trainer”? How will the mentors handle the

different social and cultural aspects of the mentees? How will their mentorship lead the mentees to be better leaders?

After three months of practice, the interview questions will be: How has your leadership style changed? (If there is any change.) What are the most challenges you have faced? And how have you handled that? How do you navigate social and cultural changes, and how do you help your mentee? How do you think you have influenced the mentee to be a better leader?

One can expect results when SRCCs and LFCRs have mutual trust and confidence.

When mentors and mentees go through a designed development process, that results in a professional learning community. It provides opportunity for communication, and the growth of both persons will enhance the spread of gospel to the end of the world.

- Mentors themselves will grow into better leaders as examples to the mentees. The mentors will need to participate and be involved in the mentees' activities, so that a real understanding will develop. This understanding helps mentees to incorporate the values and solve a problem effectively.
- Relationship building will need time, but when the mentors and the mentees are serious, trust will come quickly when they decide to share more time together. Both mentors and mentees will be honest with each other about what they can or cannot do, or what they understand or do not understand. A clear signal will be required.
- Mentors will need to introduce wisely more resources to help the mentees' growth in areas that are more complicated or more serious. As different experts may possess different talents or skills to better build the mentees, no selfishness will be allowed.

- There will be different stages and different phases for the mentoring. Therefore, the mentors will need to be open-minded in their support of the mentees. With love from God, the mentors' hearts will help them to escape the temptation of selfishness.
- Mentors will keep themselves as lifetime learners, and humble enough to learn from the mentees, as in cases where the mentees have expertise in some fields. When there is true love from God between the mentors and mentees, a joyful end can be expected.

Course 6: What Is Your Character Style?

Individual Character Analysis for Mentors and Mentees

The character of a human being is an amazing design of God.⁴⁰ Even identical twins show different character. Character is an area that people still do not understand thoroughly, but it will deeply influence the lifetime of a person, and character will not easily be changed, no matter how hard people work on it. Different characters contribute to different talents and outcomes of a team if that is properly arranged.⁴¹

Christians are expected to be Christ-like, which refers to the virtues people should pursue for lifetime. God is love. "Love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails" (1 Cor 13:4-8, NIV). Christ-

40. Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002); J. O. Hagberg and R. A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1989); Kenneth Boa, *That I May Know God: Pathway to Spiritual Formation* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1998).

41. J. M. Houston, *The Mentored Life: From Individualism to Personhood* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002); A. L. Winseman, D. O. Clifton, and C. Liesveld, *Living Your Strengths: Discover Your God-given Talents and Inspire Your Community* (New York, NY: Gallup Press, 2004).

like love is different from the character of a person, although character is a gift from God, and there is no good or bad, just different. Through the Holy Spirit, Christians learn to work together for the kingdom of God and build virtues that receive rewards from the Lord. This is his promises.

Through character analysis, one will gain insight into what tendency he or she has in a certain situation or environment. For example, some people can do things consistently: this person is a reliable worker, can do repetitive, routine jobs daily, shows patience and consistency. But he or she might not easily create new plans or ideas or develop strategy for a marketing department. This person will be a good doer, not a planner. DiSC analysis will help the team understand each person's strengths and weaknesses and how best to organize the human resources to finish tasks as a team.⁴²

What Is DiSC?

This self-assessment tool is called DiSC: D= Dominance, I= Inducement or Influence, S= Submission or Steadiness, C= Compliance or Conscientiousness or Criticism. The DiSC assessment can be used to evaluate personal behavioral aspects.

Dominance (D) is referred to the control tendency of a person. Several scholars called this drive or self-actualization. Once a personality test shows Dominance as one's most prominent characteristic, it is possible he or she may be motivated to over-drive, or win his or her co-workers, or try to gain a leadership position in the workplace.

42. Kristeen Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, "Examples of 12 DiSC Personality Types—DiSC Profiles," 2021, www.discprofiles.com (D= Dominance, I= Inducement or Influence, S= Submission or Steadiness, C= Compliance or Conscientiousness or Criticism); Bob Buford, *Discovering Your Game Plan: Defining Your Opportunity to Make a Significant Difference* (N.p.: Leadership Network, 2005).

Influence (I) refers to one's ability to communicate and behavior in social situations. This character falls under the area of influencing people, which indicates friendship, enthusiasm, and optimism. Some suggest using the term influence and inducement interchangeably.

Steadiness (S) indicates a personality that includes characteristics such as stability, modesty, sincerity, and patience.

Conscientiousness or Compliance (C) is related to structural and organizational behaviors. With the C-dominant personality type, one may inherently have a task-oriented and contemplative style. By excelling at self-monitoring, one would value accuracy in daily tasks.⁴³

What Does a DiSC Assessment Mean?

To understand the meaning of a DiSC profile, all team members should recognize that the dominant behavioral dimensions would need to be understood as applying to one team together. For example, Dominance and Influence personalities could have outgoing aspects. Compliance and Steadiness, by contrast, are regarded as signals of people who are inward-looking or conservative.

A DiSC profile also shows the degree to which a person is task-oriented or people-oriented. Dominance and Compliance lead to a task-focused personality style, and individuals with Influence and Steadiness are people-oriented. It is not necessary here to go through the questions in the assessment; by looking at the descriptions listed below, readers will easily identify their tendencies.

43. Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, "Examples of 12 DiSC Personality Types—DiSC Profiles."

In the context of this research project, the SRCCs and LFRCs are adults, so their life experiences would indicate their specific areas of strength or weakness in their character. The purpose of the DiSC assessment is to help them to mutually understand each other in deeper ways and build their relationships.⁴⁴

What Is the Right Personality According to DiSC?

Everyone's personality consists of many different emotional patterns, behaviors, and cognitive functions. Anyone's characteristic sets are complex and unique, and there is no right or wrong personality, according to the DiSC assessment. The DiSC assessment is not to help a person change his or her personality, but it will help a person understand his or her natural reaction to a specific situation. With this tool, one can make lifestyle or environmental changes to fit his or her personality and progress. As a team member, one should use this information to understand all team members' strengths and weaknesses and organize them to optimize the team's productivity.⁴⁵

44. Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, "Examples of 12 DiSC Personality Types—DiSC Profiles."

45. To learn more, see Bullwinkle and the DiSC Profile Team, <https://www.discprofiles.com/blog/2019/08/the-disc-di-style/>. There are links to descriptions of each personality style.



“Everything DISC uses four basic styles to describe how people approach their work and relationships.

DC – challenge, results, accuracy

Goals: Independence, personal accomplishment

Fears: Failure to achieve to their own standards

Leadership qualities: Setting high expectations, speaking up about problems

D – results, action, challenge

Goals: Bottom-line results, victory

Fears: Being taken advantage of or appearing weak

Leadership qualities: Showing confidence, taking charge, focusing on results

DI – action, results, enthusiasm

Goals: Quick action, new opportunities

Fears: Loss of power

Leadership qualities: Stretching the boundaries, finding opportunities

ID – action, enthusiasm, results

Goals: Exciting breakthroughs

Fears: Fixed environments, loss of approval or attention

Leadership qualities: Finding opportunities, promoting bold action

I – enthusiasm, action, collaboration

Goals: Popularity, approval, excitement

Fears: Rejection, not being heard

Leadership qualities: Showing enthusiasm, building professional networks

IS – collaboration, enthusiasm, support

Goals: Friendship

Fears: Pressuring others, being disliked

Leadership qualities: Being approachable, acknowledging contributions

SI – collaboration, support, enthusiasm

Goals: Acceptance, close relationships

Fears: Being forced to pressure others, facing aggression

Leadership qualities: Creating a positive environment, acknowledging contributions

S – support, stability, collaboration

Goals: Harmony, stability

Fears: Letting people down, rapid change

Leadership qualities: Staying open to input, showing diplomacy

SC – stability, support, accuracy

Goals: Calm environments, fixed objectives, steady progress

Fears: Time pressure, uncertainty, chaos

Leadership qualities: Maintaining composure, being fair-minded

CS – stability, accuracy, support

Goals: Stability, reliable outcomes

Fears: Emotionally charged situations, ambiguity

Leadership qualities: Showing modesty, being fair-minded

C – accuracy, stability, challenge

Goals: Accuracy, objective processes

Fears: Being wrong, strong displays of emotion

Leadership qualities: Communicating with clarity, promoting disciplined analysis

CD – challenge, accuracy, results

Goals: Efficient results, rational decisions

Fears: Failure, lack of control

Leadership qualities: Creates high standards, improving methods.

APPENDIX E

TRANSCRIPTIONS OF SELECT INTERVIEWS

The interviews were conducted in Chinese and are translated into English. Transcriptions have been lightly edited for clarity and continuity.

M1: a minister from Beijing, 2021 graduate of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (GCTS), returned to Beijing as church minister (interviewed July 7, 2021)

1. Returnees and local churches

I feel mostly they need to find a suitable church. [They] need people/ministry to help them to get accustomed to Mainland China churches. Because ways of conducting church is very different, also less old/senior members can care for those returnees. They need to fellowship with those in their age group, but it's a bit difficult.

But I think the most suitable way is for the local church to conduct counseling. But if the local church is not able, then [they] need some other organization. Even with an outside organization's help, it's important for them to help so that the returnee would be more integrated with the local church, not creating distance between the local church and the returnee.

2. Senior mentor candidates who originally came from Taiwan or Hong Kong

In my opinion, senior Christians with Hong Kong/Taiwan backgrounds have strong opinions in politics. I don't feel both sides need to come to an agreement in terms of political views, but at the very least they need to understand each other and accept reality from the other's point of view. Especially those younger Chinese students, they don't particularly dislike the Chinese government, and some may even be in support of the Chinese government; then if the senior Christians have strong opposing views toward the Chinese government, it's difficult to establish a relationship between the Chinese students and the senior Christians from Hong Kong/Taiwan.

3. The value system and Chinese government

[For example] from the value system of the Bible, how [is one] to resolve the antagonism between China and the US? How to view the two governments? Does it have to result in one being just and the other being evil? Is there a way to understand the other side?

Even though most would agree that in terms of societal structures the US is better, and maybe a little better in terms of Christian beliefs (religious rights), is that enough to conclude in absolute terms that the Chinese government is evil, and the US government is on the just side?

Is there a way to find a resolution from a biblical perspective?

M2: a minister from China Midwest, 2020 graduate of GCTS, MDiv (interviewed July 16, 2021)

1. Returnees' faith foundation

Those who accepted Jesus abroad didn't really build a solid foundation in faith before their return. So, this ministry (in my opinion) is 1 need to continue to guide them in the faith, while another aspect is to be able to help as a response mechanism between Chinese churches abroad and the returnees, on how effective the outreach efforts have been toward Chinese students while they were abroad.

From those I have encountered, either the students in the US or the groups that have returned, it is my opinion that the majority, especially those [who] accepted Christ abroad, did not build a foundation in faith. So sometimes, the local churches in China don't really want to receive these returnees. So that's why in China there are beginnings of ministries aimed toward returning students/returnees. These ministries sometimes become exclusively having returnees as members of the church. In my opinion that is not a very healthy situation.

2. The local church and returnees

Especially [if returnees are] not firm in [their] foundation of faith, (1) a lot of times it's due to these returnees can contribute to the local church right away. [Cannot serve right away in ministerial capacity] (2) to pastor the returnees presents many challenges to the local church, such as biblical views, church life and conduct, and local culture. Many returnees would expect the local church to be a caring/family-like atmosphere, while in the local churches in China, mostly pastoring is through foundational teaching and being involved in different ministries.

So that's why I feel there's a [mismatch] between the two groups. So, the returnees gradually stop attending church at a high rate.

3. The ministry of returnees

So, in my opinion, the current ministries that focus on returnees are born out of necessity but not of an ideal situation. These ministries work so that the returnees would still attend church and shifting pastoring methods.

4. The Covid-19 pandemic

Personally, I don't have much understanding with what you spoke about. But I see that most churches, especially in large cities, factoring in the pandemic, are facing the reality of having to break up into smaller groups. But it's not quite the same as small church that grew big. Currently, it's large churches (whose congregants didn't necessarily grow up in home churches) that are forced into smaller groups/gatherings, or small groups, where methods are foreign to the congregants.

5. Different size and location of local churches

I'm more familiar with medium-size cities and churches. These churches have more pressure in terms of survival as a church. Their spiritual maturity and the ability to seek [financial] support is also much more limited in comparison to large churches in large cities.

I have some direct experiences in the southwest parts of China as this has been a focus area for evangelism for some time, so there are support means (from outside sources). But even

in a medium-size city, there is also (at least one) returnee fellowship/ministry. I didn't join their services/activities, I just know about them. According to my view, these churches in medium-size cities are facing more challenges when they encounter returnees, and how to minister to them, as the cultural differences are even greater.

6. Returnees' ministry

When we conduct interviews with returnees to help and link them up to a local church, we usually ask them about their faith background and church attendance habits. Usually, we would introduce them to churches where there are younger members, so the leaders/pastors there can better understand and help them. But no matter what, I believe it's for the returnees to immerse into local churches, not [for] the local churches to change/modify to be able accept returnees. This is not possible.

7. Different perspectives of returnees and different way of sermons/teaching/caring

How do we help the returnees to localize? This may be a painful process for the returnee. Because especially those returning from North America, the pressure of life is completely different. In North America, they have a lot of resources to invest in caring ministries, especially for new believers but also for seekers. Whenever these people ask for help, the churches in America would do [what] they can help. But in China, this is not possible. So, some would think the local churches in China lack love. But the returnees' expectations toward the churches in China are not very realistic. So, the difference in expectations creates a misunderstanding. Also, in terms of spiritual nourishment (sermons) in North America, usually there [are] many layers of understanding. The new believer in North America can get something from the sermon, but more so in feeling the care and love, even though [they] may not have the opportunity to be exposed to deeper teachings.

Within China, there's much less of these layers in the messages, or Bible studies, or sermon series. This method to the returnees seems to be overly logical, maybe overly theological.

In North America, I have also observed most Chinese churches, the leaders and pastors, can take Bible truths and apply [them] into daily lives. But within China, many sermons are more doctrinal and focus on the accuracy of the truth, not on application. So, the differences in methods can also create a separation, where the returnees feel not being fed, while the local leaders feel that the returnees are not willing to seek wisdom. So, I feel both sides have room to be more accommodative.

8. Theological training in Chinese house local churches

From a theological education angle, there are a lot of historical reference points. The Chinese theological training process didn't start when Chinese people went to the US. The earliest seminary in China was started by missionaries who came to China. They started classes, studies, and eventually colleges and universities.

So, in my opinion, instead of focus on how to renovate the current theological training system, we need to find how to better accustom theological trainings so that it will be beneficial to local cultures and environments. Currently, within China there is a lack and not being able to have physical facilities (not counting underground churches and training centers).

So previously, the local ministers were trained by missionaries from another country. Then these local ministers can in turn train more local ministers. This type of teaching would be

lacking in depth, as it is not as thorough as a formal curriculum. But these local ministers have had great impact.

In the past ten or so years, we see that more and more came from China and went to seminaries either in the US or other countries, and then returned to China to serve. Currently this is still the mainstream. Most of the seminary students from China have close ties with a church back in China; they were sent by their home church. This is a healthier relationship compared with even earlier times, where those who went out to study ended up staying outside of China. (Since ministry working conditions outside of China seem preferable.)

But now much more than before, those who came out of China to study are much more willing to return, as they see the need and see the impactful ministry. There is more a sense of duty and honor to return. (As staying outside of China ministry eventually becomes a job.)

I see slowly than previously the workers were sent abroad to be trained. But now returned workers are experienced enough to train other new workers.

We can think about it this way. Currently theological training in China still in some ways is lacking.

The one thing the current training has not been able to accomplish is the training of a scholar.

As more seminary students from China are sent out to study, as they mostly enter biblical studies, focusing on the Word, as to the traditions of the churches in China. These individuals can eventually become leaders in theological training, where they will still focus on the Bible. Including systemic theology, church history. Other fields like ministerial studies may not be as quickly applicable back in China.

So, I feel there would be high-quality theological training focused on biblical studies in the not-too-distant future. And for these seminary students to have effective meaningful work after they graduate, it is crucial that they keep a close relationship with their home church in China.

No matter what the future political situation is like, the focus is to have at the same time teachers and students are both localized (in China). Right now, the students are local, but the teachers may be foreign.

M3: an elder in church youth ministry, PhD in computer science, originally from Taiwan, age 66 (interviewed August 16, 2021)

1. North American Chinese church congregations

Before Covid-19, the church congregations were 70 percent or higher who came from Mainland China, because we have Chinese language courses for youth and elementary school children after the Sunday lunch in the afternoon, and many parents wished their children [would] still learn some Chinese language.

2. The relationship between attendees and churches

Many of them just took church as a resource for support or information exchange, more social than biblical interest. But since they attended more often, they started to be involved [more deeply] in church activities, and many converted as Christians. I believe God is working among

them. People will fill emptiness . . . , and the hole in their heart will only be fulfilled by God's love.

3. More younger students from China

There were quite a few students of all grades, and they have different expectations for the struggle of the new life in US. But it will be very difficult for them to open themselves. It seemed a kind of fear, I think, during the Cultural Revolution period, people [did] not easily gain trust from each other.

The youth group that I served, they are more in the English conversation model, and I can see the struggle and difficulty of their life.

4. Senior Chinese Christians

Most of the Chinese Christian seniors like me are very willing to share our faith with the young generations, but the disciple or mentor-mentee relationship needs time to build, and in Chinese tradition, the mentee will initiate the request to the mentor, not like Jesus, who appointed his disciples to follow him. And I thought many of them are quite well equipped to be a mentor. May be some initiation of callings will [be needed].

M4: PhD in law from Beijing University, MDiv from Westminster Seminary (2019), now pastor of a church in Boston (interviewed August 19, 2021)

1. The returnees' mission in Beijing

Oh, okay [kids]. The friend I know makes connections with various churches in China, to understand their conditions, and at the same time, he also has connections with churches in the US, so he helps both parties. One is to guide churches in China in terms of how to receive these returning students, and to the churches outside of China, how they should make the returnees ready for local church culture [kids]. So my friend's work is mainly focuses on this, to first make connections with returning students, then to introduce them to local churches in China. Maybe there are some prepared messages/teachings helping the returning students how to acclimate to churches in China. (To understand there are differences between churches outside of China and churches in China). How to transition better.

For a while, we are acquaintances and have a connection but just are not very familiar with each other. I mainly know my friend who worked with Mrs. S. for some time. My friend became a Christian before me, then he returned to China, then I returned to China. When I returned to Beijing there was a reconnection, and that's when I found out about his ministry working with returning students.

2. The faith foundation of the returnees

My church is mainly focused on ministering to returnees. Those returnees who are/were members, the loss rate is quite low (retention rate is high) once they return to China. Facing differences in cultures and styles of worship, it still boils down to the individuals' lives, that's the root, whether they have a firm foundation.

The first thing is to make sure that they're reborn, that they really understand the meaning of salvation. Because many in the church don't really have that understanding.

There must be the Word, there must be the gospel preached. That their hearts really were pierced by the gospel. Their lives must have been changed by the gospel, with understanding of eternal salvation, eternal death, a clear understanding. Returnees who have a solid foundation seek out churches when they return to China. [That] many returnees veer away is not due to outward physical circumstance; really it is rooted in his/her life.

3. The importance of church life and preparation for returning

With regards to what is a church, why you need to submit to a physically meeting church, some may have a very vague understanding. So, when they return, if their previous submission to a local church was based more on bonding with other brothers and sisters, or church activities, then once they return, of course all these things are absent in China. Then the returnee is faced with the challenge of getting accustomed to a new group of people who are quite different in many ways. Even the teachings can be different, style differences, these things result in them not [being] willing to submit to a local church in China. But on the flipside, for reborn believers, they will continue to search out a church. [It is] a bit more difficult, so indeed some may be lost from this. From what I can see and understand, the preparation must be done while the returnees are still in the US churches, prior to their departure. Because for one: They really understand salvation, and two, they need to clearly understand the meaning and importance of church life. It's more of a growth process of spiritual life. And third, surely there can be an accompanying help ministry that would provide counseling, introduction to churches, maybe cooperation from churches both in the US and China. There can be these types of ministries to aid in the transition.

I see these above three points can be actionable right now.

4. The seniors and their preparation to be a mentor; relationship building

Surely having a group that would provide care we can certainly consider. But what I worry is that for one, the people here don't understand the conditions in China.

What the returnees face may not be understood or felt by the mentors. We would counsel and advise according to our experiences here in the US, but to the returnee it's not helpful, maybe actually challenging. Another issue is that being far apart, the bonding between the two parties is probably weaker, [because communication] through phone or email is distanced. What they need is accompanying and fellowship, not someone trying to teach something to them.

5. Building fellowship before a mentor-mentee relationship

Yes, the distance is an issue. But this can still be tried. Maybe it is that the mentors in the US would relate to students who are still here. Without a connection that's started here, then it's even more difficult once they return to China to attempt to start a connection. So instead of trying to help the other side from here, maybe it's better to concentrate the efforts over here. In this way, once the student does return, then it's more likely that the mentor and the returnee would continue their connection.

M5: a youth minister from Beijing, master's degree in economics from Beijing

University, now MDiv student at GCTS (interviewed August 20, 2021)

1. Chinese city house church style

I cannot speak to all churches in China since it varies from geographical area to area. So, I can only speak to what I have observed. The church that I attended was mostly comprised of young members, maybe fewer than ten elderly members among a few hundred church members.

But I know of churches in the countryside where the members are mostly elderly with much smaller numbers of younger members. One thing I have taken notice of is that the work of the gospel is severely hindered by the government policies, especially for school-age children from elementary school through high school. So, most children's ministry is catered toward believers' children. I did witness some movements of children's ministry in the past fifteen years or so but have observed that these works have not been particularly effective. As in my previous work with college students, there have been instances where I have seen students from families with Christian background but have noticed that these students have little understanding of faith as well as not having believed in Jesus with lack of knowledge of salvation. Those students who are solid in their faith represent a very small percentage. So, we can infer that the second generation of believers in China may need a lot more help. Some reject the faith while others act more like a Sunday Christian.

2. Young adults' mission in Beijing

Toward new young adults, the ministry work is also difficult. I remember in the year 2000 through 2013, some ten years, these years the students' ministry was strong and fruitful, but in recent years it has been on a downward slope. The number of new converts among bachelor students has been on a downward trend; there are some converts among graduate students. [Previously this person mentioned] the second generation of believers, when they came to college, the retention rate is not especially optimistic. At the same time, those students who do not have a Christian background present an even harder situation. So many churches are comprised of members from the revivals of the 1980s. At the same time, these members are getting older in age. So, in some aspect I see the church in some way is in decline. At the same time, I have heard other churches in Xiandong where they're able to maintain better. So, in some small pockets within the country things are okay, but it seems to be in decline.

3. Government religious regulation

Especially after the recent newly published government regulations toward religious activities, there's a lot more limitation toward being able to work with students. So, it appears the environment is not very optimistic overall. Toward mature adults I have little understanding.

4. Sunday school in Beijing's house churches and cell groups

I think there are various formats, but I know most have Sunday school and Bible study. I know there's Sunday worship, but some churches are less structured after the main service. Some may not require Sunday school attendance. Some others are more structured and systemized and detailed in terms of pastoring and discipleship.

In my church the cell group leaders would conduct one-on-one care so that each member would be discipled.

Not sure currently, as I am studying abroad, but prior to my departure, let me think, about 300 committed members, and another 150 attendees. So about 450.

5. Students' ministry and the Covid-19 pandemic

As far as students' ministry, many will depart once they graduate. Back in 2015 the percentage of students had declined to about 30 percent. So currently more are comprised of working young professionals. This is the largest part of our congregation.

In my view (maybe another co-worker would know more), the students' ministry is not especially successful at this time. Previously there [were] some students, but they have graduated recently. There is not as much new inflow, and the outreach efforts are not particularly well done in my opinion. Currently our Sunday services are attended by about twenty to thirty people, not counting children, so just adults. There are quite a few who are not counted as students, some are PhD candidates. Of course, due to the pandemic little outreach work has been done in the past year, but even prior to that, there were fewer students bringing students to attend church.

At another church, I took notice that their students' ministry has more structure and detail. Mostly it's through friends bringing friends to come to church. Then through a Bible study either after lunch or dinner (to introduce faith to seekers). Overall, I think in my current church the students' ministry is more loosely organized. Those who are involved in students' ministry here have observed that once those students return to China, a large percentage of these students do not return to church. Overall, there are many students in Boston, but to do a good job is not easy. The first challenge we have is whether we can attract students to come to our meetings, and the second challenge is whether we can help them keep the faith once they convert, so that when they return to China, they would continue to attend church, since going back to China presents a more challenging environment.

6. The mentor and faith growth

When I was in China, I know of two or three people who had such a connection, where they have kept long-term relationships through continued communication. In these instances, indeed, they can keep their faith. Of course, these examples may not be representative of the whole, but they do exist.

I don't know the specifics, but I did have an acquaintance who kept communication with an American elderly sister in the US, so that she (he) was able to keep this faith. Another instance I know of is someone who returned from France, who seems to believe sometimes and not believe in other times, and no one [was available] to really follow up, [so this person] eventually veered away. From my understanding, the reason for the returnees not [being] able to keep the faith is not necessarily that there's no one to follow up. But one main reason is that while they were abroad, the foundation of faith was not implemented in them. Of course, there are two ways the foundation of faith was not built. One is that they didn't take time to learn who God is and what God is like, so this type of student has no root. Along with no one to follow up, it's very easy for this type of student to veer away. The second type I see is that the way that the student has been pastored in the US is much different from the way they pastor in China. Some churches in the US may focus on the positive side where it focuses on the benefits of believing, where if you believe then you're blessed in all you do, so they have no concept of carrying the cross of Christ, in terms of paying a price. So, when they return to China, in home churches it's mainly about sacrificing, so that leads the returnees not being] willing to attend those churches in China. So, in general I think there are these two challenges.

M6: a church brother, PhD in educational health and safety, worked in a children's hospital in Boston, age 37 (interviewed August 21, 2021)

1. Returnees' ministry

For question 6, with regards to the returnees I do have some understanding as I do have some contacts with them. Some returnees who attended my fellowship, we would stay in contact for a couple of years. But afterwards, they have found a local church to attend—these are the best instances showing that they have transitioned well. Others are not willing to find local churches. They would rather stay in contact with us, maybe through one-on-one communication. The reasons for these not [being] willing to find local churches may be due to religious restrictions due to work or other circumstances. They don't want to make trouble. Some others are not able to get accustomed to the culture of local churches in China, perhaps due to age or worship style differences. At first, I would make time to stay connected, but once I became busy then the frequency of our communications lessened over time. I feel for many returnees they would be more at ease with the fellowship environment we have here in the US. I mean to say even so, they may not be very regular in attending even in the environment here in the US. It's much more difficult to them to transition to a totally different environment once they return to China. However, overall, I believe the most important factor is whether they have a thirst and hungry heart for God. If they have that, no matter where they end up, they will find some way to keep up on devotional studies, and after transition back to China, they will slowly go find churches on their own. They may find that the church in China is much different, but they would find their place to serve within a local church and become a family member of a local church. I feel this part is really led by God, not necessarily something we can impose.

2. Government policy, evangelical adjustment, WeChat, and Bible selling

For question 7, regarding the house churches, during the celebration of the hundred-year anniversary of the country, many WeChat accounts were eliminated [by the authorities]. In my opinion this is quite serious. Many of these WeChat accounts has been established for many years [they are one of the main ways for groups of believers to stay connected]. [There is] no place to purchase a Bible or download one. If one wanted a Bible you must purchase from a three-self church or a Catholic church. So, I think I have some understanding, not super in-depth.

3. Senior Chinese Christian mentors

I see, so kind of like a counselor. I feel it's very needed. I would put down a 5. And especially we need these counselors to be equipped, some training, and have time, that their kids have grown, so that they really would have time to care for these students. Nowadays, it's not only simply treating the students to a meal, but you also really must share from the heart, and [make a] time commitment. The relationship needs to be established upon trust to a point where when the student encounters a problem, they would feel comfortable to come to the counselor/mentor, and this would be the time when the gospel can really have an effect.

Not just some superficial gatherings, so yes, I think it's very necessary. Like you have described, trainer, disciple, mentor types of co-workers are needed.

4. Training of mentors

I would agree that such training is very much needed. At the same time, it is important to know that these students, no matter if they came earlier during high school age or college age, their culture is still much connected with China through the WeChat platform. Much of the media content is transmitted through that platform, which shapes their views and culture. So, it is my opinion that those mentors/counselor must have a listening heart, especially those who have been in the US for twenty years. They don't understand that culture.

For example, if we have these senior mentors with a Taiwanese background, they will need a lot of mental adjustment with a soft heart. They cannot preach to the students as a know-it-all. One must first listen, and it is a good sign if the students are even willing to talk. In my observation, even among the same age group, the culture differences between the two groups can still be great. For example, Taiwanese may want to chat about politics, but those from China don't focus much on politics, but more on actual daily life needs. In my observation many Taiwanese hold on to the ideal of keeping democracy, but those from China, including myself, don't pay much attention to politics. So, I think we need to be Christ-centered, knowing that no matter where you're from there are differences, knowing that can prevent from talking too much about what one knows. When a student hears that you know it all, they tend to disregard you later.

I think most students are very realistic. So, it is important to have training for these mentors, from a cultural perspective.

5. Qualifications of mentors

For question 9, I would answer 4. Even for myself, I am not sure if I'm equipped well enough. From my own perspective, for a mentor to mentor me or someone younger, it is important to get equipped, since most of the time we would stay/focus only on what we know or studying the Bible from our perspective and asking questions. Especially most students that come over are here for a master's or PhD degree. The mentors need to have certain training or even post-graduate degrees to maintain posture. Otherwise, it is likely the students would challenge a mentor's authority. So, it is important to have solid training in different aspects of life and faith. More importantly, I think it's important to be able to have actual contact in daily life with the students. For example, once I got busy, I hung out less with the students. That resulted in not knowing what the students think about and not knowing their needs, how to realistically help them. So sufficient training is important; [mentors] also need to spend time with them, and at the same time maintain one's own life. All in all, this work can be challenging.

With regards to finding out or to defining what it means to be well equipped, I think there are a lot of resources such as Sunday school classes and different training seminars. The key being whether the mentor candidate sees this need, being necessary to be fulfilled. Among those have been baptized, maybe it's necessary for us to bring forth this idea and need to them. Many may think it's only a calling from God to you but didn't catch that they need to be involved as well. Many may have the idea that it's only who are leaders do this work of mentoring. In my view I believe God has called each believer to help spread the gospel. So, another issue to address is that when we preach the gospel, it's important to impart the ideal that all believers can work the work of the Lord, not just leaders or pastors.

6. Returnees' preparation for return

I think first is that they need to establish a habit of regular devotionals. Previously there was a brother in my fellowship. He was baptized in our fellowship, then after he returned to China, he started work in Schenzen. At first when he returned, he didn't transition very well, but I'm thankful to God that for one year after he returned, we found time to read the Bible together once a week. So, it's important not to assume that they can find a suitable church right away. There still a need to keep track and see if they have any problems. After a certain period after they have settled down, then you can let go. Some have found suitable churches, but a few do not due to busy schedules and social events; also having children or not can be a factor. [To] another brother I suggested why don't you start a fellowship on your own? He answered that he felt unsafe to do so. I think the most important thing is to build up is a strong habit to read the Scripture and pray. When they can apply the Word in their lives that's the most powerful.

For others, they still need to find a suitable fellowship or a small group. They still need to find a group, because long term without a group it's easy to sidetrack. In my opinion, one possibility would be to have the returnees be able to serve in the church in some capacity prior to their departure. So, then they would understand that once they're baptized, they would understand that they would carry certain responsibility for this church family. Not just come to listen to Sunday messages and nothing else. So that once they return, they would remember that they have some experience in serving in the church. That they would feel they're a necessary functioning part of a church. Not only an audience but also a contributor, a wall, a brick, a column. With a perspective of being one church of Christ, there are no walls between churches, but each believer needs to play an active part being an element of the church. Also being in a group the importance of caring for one another, praying for one another, studying the Bible together, these three points can show someone who is more stable within a church. Adding to personal devotional time, and following up after their return, the part where they have served in church while in the US will help them to get motivated that they can continue to work for God once they return.

M7: a church elder, a faithful servant of the Lord, was a general manager of a big company in Boston, deputy dean of the China Evangelical Seminary in Taiwan, conducted training in various places in Mainland China for many years, age 81 (interviewed August 24, 2021)

1. Initiation of the mentor-mentee relationship

Usually, those who need counseling seek me out, [rather than] me going to ask those who need help. Those who need help come and find me; that's how it starts for me. So, I don't know how to [approach] those who need counseling.

2. Mission activities among Chinese people

But I see that the program you're forming, what's the progress, do you have some structure or framework? It is my feeling that this type of work should be a co-working relationship with a church. Some churches have many gifted seniors so that mentoring is not a

problem. But in general, those who have needs usually don't ask for help at first. So maybe it's the pastor who knows someone who has needs and introduces them to this ministry. Possibly due to the leaders in church being too busy. However, I feel that the whole program may need [to] find out what similar ministries are doing, such as Overseas Campus Life, what's their experience. I feel that for Chinese-background people it's not very easy, since they're not like western culture where people are not afraid of being honest, and not afraid of someone else knowing their personal details. These are things that came to my mind first.

I would recommend first to contact similar ministries about their experiences. Even though I do not have firsthand experience, I have heard from friends who have exposure to this type of ministry. One of the largest problems is that the returnees cannot find suitable churches to join. As you know, house churches, especially those that are under some form of pressure, don't welcome outsiders right away. You cannot join directly. Usually, it's introduced by friends. So, in house churches, it's complex sometimes. Especially difficult are the ones in the villages. Even in large cities, there are house churches. But most large cities have more personnel and resources. Perhaps you need to understand first what [are] the returnees' conditions while they're in the States. Is this the parameter of your research?

Is it something that you're thinking on your own, or is it something where you have a few partners who are starting to form something solid? I am considering whether it's just a plan now, or are you yourself being involved in this ministry? But your plans may be apart from reality? I would recommend you do some more research.

I see, so to clarify, at AFC, OCC, have you already communicated with them?

What's their reaction? If they see and agree with the need and vision, why don't you develop this ministry from these organizations?

3. Seniors as mentors

In my opinion, these mentors are ones that preferably came to the US as students, got baptized, became Christians, and have served in the church. This type of mentor I think would have an easier [task] to make connection with the students. Take myself as an example, I came from Taiwan; all I know are the methods that I grew up with. This type of thinking is much different even comparing it with American culture, much different from the cultural background of Chinese students. For example, back in Kaohsiung, there was a fellowship for the graduated young professionals. At that time, there were very few fellowships for this age group. So, at that time, that's why it was easy to gather these members. What I mean is that in our current time, the people are much different. In terms of being a mentor or mentee it's all different. For example, Brother S., who came from China and has a solid foundation in the faith, can be very suitable as a mentor candidate. So, I feel this type of example is much better suited.

You often spoke about the early student-led Bible studies comprised of mainly Taiwanese students. There are no longer these types of groups. The members from these Bible studies would have a generational gap toward the Chinese students.

Whether you can find suitable workers hinges on this point. This would be my opinion.

4. Strategy for the missions (two examples)

My situation is this: among strangers, you need some type of relationship or introduction first. Let me give you two examples since these are younger people. These two have great accomplishments in their profession. One attends an American church; this person has a difficult time to reconcile what was taught in one church versus how church is conducted. As you know,

church culture varies quite a bit. This person mainly has difficulties facing what he/she perceives what the Bible teaches but then the church conducts [itself] differently, so then this person was getting ready to leave church. The first counseling session we had, I just listened to what this person said. After listening I gave some possibilities and slowly gained depth of understanding. Previously this person couldn't find answers from several sources, but after this person came to me, we have become good friends.

Another example was in China, while I was conducting teaching. This student had heard my lesson and came to speak to me. This student was one who left his home church to establish [his] own church. There are quite a number of these instances in China. After the lesson this person seemed out to ask me if I can be his/her mentor. I said of course. We started once a month, and he went over all the questions that he had and whether there are books he can read to learn from. We communicated for a while. The church that he started from one location grew to eight locations. Previously we communicated more regularly, but right now we stay in touch. The growth of his church is much more in a spirit of unity than many other churches. So, this was a good success example. These were my experiences. So, one was just a single person, then the other became a leader of a church.

But most importantly is still the introduction phase. [In] the example of the single person I had already known this type of counseling, but we just didn't have opportunity to discuss deeper. So then he found me. The other heard my lesson in a classroom. So, therefore I believe it's a natural connection where even before we talked, we had some sort of a connection, some sort of friendship.

If there was not a prelude to the relationship, then it might be difficult for strangers to meet up and establish a mentor/mentee relationship. The starting point is very important.

It's regarded as a church in the city. The churches in the villages are more difficult to get involved in, since they do not have a complete theological training system. They tend to train up their own and not feel the need to consult outside sources. I can give you an example: they came to my training classes, and it was composed of leaders from a few churches who came together. When they heard my class, they responded with agreement, and I wanted to teach them to establish a center for theological training, kind of like a central kitchen for all their franchise stores. So, in this center is where there will be trained pastoral staff, those who [do] counseling or other ministries, that these ministries can support all the surrounding churches. They think it's doable, the local leaders wanted to do it, so I led the leaders step by step to accomplish it. In the process, toward the end, we encountered an elderly sister who was the original founder. They wanted to follow the Bible word for word as "women are not supposed to be leaders," so I suggested that we can give the title of head deacon to her. But they responded that there's no such term in the Bible. Due to this position title issue, it took two years. So you can see in different areas there are different tripping stones.

Yes, it is important to have introduction in place first, and then send the personnel. If you were to do it without prior relationship it might be difficult.

5. Zoom training method

And so, there is a church where for three months, every Friday I was able to conduct training via Zoom. And the leaders who paid attention really were appreciative, as much of the information is what they have not heard. But for them, to carry out the training that they learned may be difficult since the congregants vary quite a bit. Some are very charismatic, while others have firm beliefs in one denomination. These types of issues are difficult to solve over online

formats. There is immediate familiarity and liking when we meet physically, but in an online format, even though they respect me, for them to go out and unify their church there's difficulty. These are issues and difficulties that surface as churches try to expand.

I don't have solutions for that, but often if we meet up in person, it seems to be easier to come up with a solution.

I must let you know that I'm past eighty years old, so may not be suitable to be in the field, as my sight and strength may be waning. So, I just reduce my serving capacity and do as much as I can. So, this is my current condition. So, there's not too much I can help you with.

M8: a deacon/elder of a Chinese church in Boston, computer engineer, came to the US from China, baptized for twenty-four years, age 58 (interviewed August 26, 2021)

Students from Mainland China

Well, I only join the students' group occasionally. We do have a fellowship for UMass students. Occasionally I would join. Overall, I think the students today are much different than the time when I came to the States. Their needs are different. Their home environment has changed and [there have been] societal changes since the time when I came from China. Their needs are different, but I still think in the hearts there is still a need for the gospel. Mostly it's through some type of care ministry, then we can share the gospel with them. One of differences that I see is the reason to come to church. When I came to the US some twenty or thirty years ago it was to seek some type of fellowship, or due to the warm passionate hearts of the Christian who invited us to go to church. Nowadays, they don't seem to have such strong needs, but still I see the younger members among my church being willing to come.

Not in recent years, not really involved. About fifteen years ago, I did some of this type of ministry. At that time, the number of students from China wasn't as many as now. So, during that time each family in the church would adopt one foreign student. It was more organized. It was at least fifteen years ago. So not in recent times, only to help the student ministry occasionally nowadays.

Yes, we have one specifically for UMass students.

Not very sure, but I think mainly in Chinese. Mostly in Chinese.

We do have a bit of English ministry, mainly conducted online, following the Alpha Course. Some UMass law students may attend, but few.

I am not sure. My guess is that for the most part it is acceptable to them, otherwise if they don't like it they won't come. So, I don't really know.

M9: a youth pastor from Beijing, GCTS MDiv graduate, now in Wheaton PhD program, age 36 (interviewed August 27, 2021)

1. Campus ministry in Chinese cities and the retention rate

First, before I came to the US, while in China I was always involved in students' ministry (college). In my view, campus ministry not only involves the colleges in China, but it is also actually part of a larger scope including youth and younger generations. Then it extends to students who are getting ready to go abroad for graduate studies within their original field. It even includes high school students, graduate work, even PhD candidates. In my view it's all connected.

In the past twenty years, no matter if it's the wave of students going abroad or the wave of returnees coming back to China, it's a major trend. More and more students go abroad than previous generation. In the 1970s and 1980s many students ended up staying abroad, but we can see a large percentage of students who went abroad, starting in the 1990s, they will return to China. So, the wave of returnee is a significant trend.

Many students, when they went abroad, to the US, to the UK, to Europe, they would have the opportunity to hear the gospel, as it's more open, including all types of campus ministries, in the US such as InterVarsity or the Crusade organizations, in the UK IFTS, many active organizations are involved in this ministry. Many Chinese churches are also involved in campus ministry. So, many Chinese foreign students came to know Christ Jesus from hearing the gospel while abroad. These are all very positive signs.

The challenge comes with the retention rate. The percentage of Chinese foreign students who became believers is quite high, but when they return to China to attain employment, their dropout rate is also very high. Within China some returnee ministries have done some surveys. The surveys show the dropout rate can be as high as 80 to 90 percent. So, we must look at this significant loss. It is very precious that they have heard the gospel while abroad, but why is it that when they return to China and attain employment then they stop attending church or even are not able to maintain their faith. I think this is a very complex topic, very difficult to come up with a simple answer. But I feel there are at least a few points we can begin to understand.

Most of anyone came to understand the gospel through a cultural lens, and I believe, taking the US for an example, taking the culture at that time into perspective, using English to understand the gospel. I believe there will be a lot of misunderstanding within this context. [People] didn't really truly understand salvation. Especially factoring in the current US culture of self-centeredness, consumerism, postmodernism thinking, under this circumstance I believe there are lost aspects of the true gospel. The true gospel being that Jesus Christ died for us on the cross, that sense of self-sacrificing, is something we're to follow, to carry the cross for the gospel. So, I think to effectively help the returnees the campus ministries need to accurately present the gospel with the help of co-workers who knows the mother tongue [Chinese], to be able to make sure that the students can express by themselves the accurate understanding of the gospel.

They need to be able to answer who is Jesus, what is the gospel. Not letting this faith become only a method to change my current life. Only a way to let my intellect to get a message, only an intellectual "spa" kind of understanding. C. S. Lewis said, "If you're only looking for an emotional comfort, or to change your emotional state, Christianity is a terrible choice." Pouring a glass of wine and comfortably lying on a couch is a much better way to gain some emotional comfort, but this is not Christianity. So, this is the first aspect, being able to understand the gospel through Chinese, the mother tongue, to accurately understand the gospel.

2. Cross-cultural training

The second point is that no matter if it's the US or Europe, the social, political, and cultural environment is extremely different in comparison with China. Most of the returnee ministries or campus ministries are not able to sufficiently prepare the returnees prior to their departure; to be able to prepare them for a very different environment. The difference in the environment is not only limited to societal and cultural aspects. The local church in China is also drastically different than the ones in western countries. Those house churches in China are especially different from western churches, in many areas such as theology, spiritual traditions,

even church life. In western churches usually there's a comfortable church building, and no one stops you from going to church, very free, everyone is nice. But in China it's much different. To start, it's difficult to find churches. It's not open, not public, especially if you are thinking of attending a house church. If you were to go to a three-self church, it's another topic. So, in summary the environment is very different in many ways. So, to do a good job in returnee ministry, in many ways, it's a cross-cultural education. These students, no matter if they went abroad to study or return to China after they study, ideally, I think our efforts should be preparing them to become a cross-cultural missionary. Maybe not a professional missionary, but a student missionary or a young professional missionary, since they're to enter society to carry out the gospel. The time when they enter and leave the US, it's two cross-cultural events/experiences. In my opinion the lack of training in understanding cross-cultures leads these students to experience serious reverse culture shock. When a student returns, the first tough problem is to find a church. If one cannot find a church, just as John Wesley said, even if you were a burning torch in a fire, taken out of the fire, it will dwindle and cool off. No matter how firm your personal faith is, it is a matter of time before it dies off. So, I feel it's important to understand the differences. [If a person] cannot find a church, no faith-supporting group, and the high pressure in the work environment, especially in large cities, leaves one without any time to spend on faith or religion. Also, no cell group, no pastors, no spiritual leaders to encourage them. So, it's no wonder that the dropout rate is high. How much can you possibly have self-control/discipline? It's not realistic. So personally, when I chat with returnees, is that the most important thing is first to return to the gospel, use your mother tongue to accurately understand it. Second, to be prepared as a cross-cultural missionary. Why train these returnees as cross-cultural missionaries? Because many times the environment in China is indeed very difficult, very challenging. If a missionary was not properly prepared to face a tough cross-cultural environment, the missionary will fail. Likewise, for the returnees it's important to prepare them for serious challenges.

3. The returnees' problems

I would also like to express additional thinking as to why they need to be prepared as a cross-cultural missionary. One thing is that they must carry a sense of mission when they return. Otherwise, without a sense of mission, one's life most likely [will] just drift around. Likewise, for a Chinese student to leave China, they should also carry a sense of mission to study abroad. Going abroad to study is not just to embellish oneself and come back with a good degree to get a good job with a label of being a "returnee." I feel if this was the only reason for a Christian student to study abroad, then I feel it's pathetic, too sad. Going abroad is to widen your view, to carry a deeper heart for the kingdom of God, so that what you have learned through your studies can become something that helps you share the gospel. So, [no] matter if it's studying abroad or returning, one must carry a sense of mission. We know that every year there's hundreds of thousands of returnees each year. On the conservative low-end estimate, there's at least a few tens of thousands of Christian returnees. [Among] these few tens of thousands of Christian returnees the dropout rate is in the 90 percentiles. But the hundreds of thousands of returnees, their employment rate is high, up in the 90th percentile. So, this shows that most returnees can indeed acclimate to the environment of China, no matter if it's political, cultural, or societal pressures. They are indeed able to return, transition, and find a job that comparatively is suitable and satisfactory to them. They're able to accomplish this. But why do the returnee Christians have such [a] high dropout rate [in terms of their faith]? This shows a very unpleasantly truthful

picture. These Christian returnees place more importance on their career life than their spiritual life. Why is one able to transition back to a society and find a job, but one cannot transition into a church, cannot hold fast to their faith? To state the bottom line, to them the spiritual life is not that important. Not that important, finding a job is more important. So, one saying I know is that if you know where you're going, the whole world will make a way for you. So, I feel that these outward factors do not determine whether they can find a suitable church back in China. I think it's the internal factors that make the determination. Once again, it's the understanding they have toward the gospel, and the understanding they have toward their mission. I believe Christian returnees who have a sense of mission, when they return, they will be able to find a church, they will be able to get accustomed to that environment. But this hinges upon the churches in China, and the churches abroad, all those involved with student ministry, how to have a whole/complete strategy, a kingdom-minded heart, and [sensitivity] to cross-cultural training resources, and to be able to inject a sense of mission to the various groups of returnees. Also, to send them, to bless them to return. Also, it's best, no matter if it's students going abroad or students returning, when they have finished their studies, both the churches in China and abroad should work very closely together. For a student, even before he/she goes abroad, a connection should be made to a local church and fellowship even before they depart from China. Likewise, for the returnee, the church abroad should have already made connections with a suitable church, fellowship, cell group, prior to his/her return. This would be the ideal situation.

It is just as bad if we were to send a returnee back but didn't make the proper connection, while we also stopped communicating with the returnee, and no one knows what happened to them. This becomes the large numbers of loss as we see it today, loss of fish through a broken net. We need to establish a network of churches to a point that this net is dense enough, so that the fish cannot easily be lost. So, in my mind it's a little mixed up now, so I will stop here.

4. Church styles and communication

I believe it's critically important. I think it's a point of weakness both for the churches in China and churches abroad with regards to having mentorship. Within China, the house churches have no concept or take no consideration of it. Even the relationship between the older members and the younger members is in a stressed situation. Many of the younger members see the older leaders [being] like King Saul, and the older leaders see the younger members as Absalom, looking for opportunity to revolt against them. So, it is this type of relational situation. Even my senior pastor only relies on his own trials and failures, no one is there to guide him, to guide him how to build a church, or to guide him in terms of how-to pastor, when he encounters problem how to work through it. Very little.

5. Mentor types

For me, those born after 1980, for this generation, me as a pastor, it has improved a lot, as I will actively go and seek out my mentors. Certainly, my senior pastor is my mentor, and I have mentors in different areas. For campus ministry, I have a mentor. For my marriage and family, I have a mentor. So indeed, I feel that mentorship is very important toward a healthy spiritual life. There is a classic example, for one to have a healthy spiritual life, you need a Paul who is your senior, a mentor. Then if you have someone of about the same age in your life like a Barnabas, a spiritual friend/partner. Lastly, you would need someone who is younger than you like a Timothy or Titus, where I'm a mentor to someone else. I feel that if all Christians can have all three types of relationships in their lives, then the whole church is a healthy organization. I think I have seen

a survey conducted by Saddleback Church, led by Pastor Rick Warren, they have a vision for global mission and all the age groups have good pastoral ministry. He talked about the youth and children's ministry, where how to enable a youth to lead a healthy life and to be able to sustain his faith, including his character, so that they don't end up in jail, not obeying the law and resulting in a broken life. One of the key important elements beside having good parents/healthy family, it is important to have an adult mentor of the same sex, who can have close relationship, can become a mentor for the child's life, can accompany the child, provide a safe environment so the child can express all their problems and struggles, then provide to the child helpful advice. If there's someone like that, then this youth will have a smoother trajectory for his/her life than another who does not have a mentor, much more stable and healthier. I was very impressed by this survey, as it shows how important mentorship is. So, I feel what you're doing in terms of putting together this mentorship program is very important for younger believers/returnees.

M10: a pastor of a Chinese church in Boston, PhD in paleontology from University of Pennsylvania, MDiv from GCTS, originally from Taiwan, in the US for thirty years, age 60 (interviewed August 31, 2021)

1. Testimony of one's calling

One time God impressed upon me to go to Chong Ching to read up on the story of Watchman Nee. I was already familiar with his story. So that day I went online to find the story and then read it anew once again. While reading, God gave me a vision about the experiences of Watchman Nee. I needed to come down from the height of my career; in the future I will have a church of my own. So, when I heard this, I called my wife, who was in California. I was quite sad at that time because I liked my career, so I was crying. R [his wife] asked me whether I had peace in my heart? I said, it's very weird, but I sense that I see my spirit is seeing myself crying. But in my spirit, I do have peace, so R said that's correct, this is indeed God's calling. So later we started to prepare. That was around 2005. In 2006 we resigned from work, and I was getting ready to go back to Taiwan to tell my parents. But when I returned to Taiwan, I was not able to open my lips since they were not Christians, and they often quarreled with us regarding religion for many years. So, I returned to Taiwan and worked at a research institute. While working there, my parents became believers in Jesus. When my father became a Christian, his change was very quick. He would read the Bible once a year, so after about five years, I tested my father by asking some questions. For example, Dad, if I went to a seminary, how would you feel? He surprised me with his answer. He said, I think that's a pretty good idea. One year after that, I have decided to really resign, so then I asked my father once again, If I went to a seminary to study, how would he feel? He said he would feel honored. It would bring honor to the family if our family had a pastor/preacher come out of it. So, I knew this was a very clear response from God.

2. Preparation and leading to be a pastor

I first came to Westminster [Theological Seminary] to study. Later after one and half years of studies, I came to Boston. A Dr. S. had a fellowship in Harvard Medical Center. Dr. S. asked me to come to lead the fellowship once, both me and my wife. After our sharing, the

second day God told me to transfer to Boston. I was very surprised. So, I began to search for a seminary, then found Gordon-Conwell, applied, and was accepted. So, we transferred here and finished my studies.

Originally, I didn't plan on staying in Boston. Right before graduation, while I was washing dishes, [someone] suddenly told me that your senior pastor has resigned. It was Pastor W at that time. So, I told my wife, and she was also very surprised as we all thought Pastor W was very well, everyone found him to be agreeable and respected him. One week later, an elder called me on the phone, and he said, don't tell other people, but our senior pastor suddenly announced that he has resigned. So, he asked me whether I would like to stay on and pastor the church. I told him that I was very surprised, as a week ago God has spoken to me about this, but I didn't want to stay in Boston because it's too cold. I wanted to go somewhere warmer. Anyway, I went back to the research institute in Taiwan to visit old friends. One of my Christian friends there told me if God didn't want you to stay on, why did he tell you about the event ahead of time?

I applied to a couple of other churches, but it wasn't successful. So, then we settled that indeed this was God's will, so for the time being we stayed on until now. That's the overall story.

M11: an MBA from Taiwan, came to the US for thirteen years, visited many universities' evangelical groups to recruit Chinese students to study in the US, now MDiv student at GCTS, age 43 (interviewed September 21, 2021)

1. Returnees' ministry in China

I know there are several ministries in North America that focus on returnees' ministry. They mainly work to help make connections. Some are more public/open while some others are more careful/closed. So indeed, there are some of these ministries.

Right now, it's still difficult to say what I will do or if I will stay in the US. But toward those students from China, I will have some burden. Although I don't know how God will guide me to continue work in this area, still seeking. Previously, when I worked in a Christian school [in Illinois] it was to provide a way for students to come here to study. However, that is not my current work.

The fellowship that I attend indeed is made up mostly of students and young professionals. Many have recently graduated, not yet married, and have obtained employment here.

Currently we sort of divide the work temporarily, as the kids themselves need to have fellowship life, so on Fridays we will bring the kids to their meetings. (The student/young professional fellowship I attend on my own as part of my ministry.) But previously we attended everything together.

Yes, we got married toward the end of 2007.

M12, questionnaire responses, September 27, 2021

I would agree [about question 8], since many Chinese returnees decided to follow Jesus while in the US, but then after they return, they may drop out due to various reasons. So, I agree the seniors would be a help in this situation. . . .

With regards to the CCS, I believe they have sufficient Bible knowledge and training to be a mentor. However, they probably don't understand China well enough. So, I'm planning to have some training classes for them. These classes would provide information. Also planning to establish a platform where the returnee and mentor can connect based on their commonalities such as their field of study or hobbies. For example, both the returnee and mentor may have studied EE, where they would [have] the same topic of conversation. So, in terms of their faith foundations, they're well prepared, but they need some update on the current situation in China. So, their training is not quite complete without these classes before they can become mentors. On the role of mentors: Another problem that arises is that the elderly may be in their comfort zone, not willing to come out and serve in this capacity. So, there is a need to share this vision and calling with them. Then they might have the burden for this ministry. This platform needs to be well designed; the preliminary design would have the returnee and mentor meet six times before they are officially in this mentor/mentee capacity. I got this idea from the West Point Academy, where they also have this mentorship program. I would like to adapt this process/step. If the vision is not clear to these seniors, they may not be willing to come out to serve. There is also a need for prayers.

M13: a church member with a master's degree in electrical engineering, worked as an engineer in Boston, actively attended church services, age 33 (interviewed September 27, 2021)

Difficulties for returnees

I think there are two aspects. One aspect is mainly informational, such as about the governmental regulations within China, and how to find a church, perhaps through a network of connection to make an introduction. The other aspect is to know about the habits/styles of the brothers and sisters that he will meet with. In addition, like the kite idea, indeed the mentor in the US still needs to provide some company, to accompany them through this time. So not just training on knowledge, but when the returnee experience higher than normal pressures there is a need for the mentors here to support them.

As I have ministered to some visiting scholars from China previously, some of those who returned are still willing to confess that they're Christians, while others will choose not to confess publicly but only privately, especially if there's political pressure. Most common is on certain official surveys, they will not be willing to list themselves as Christians. I'm not sure how to respond to these circumstances. It's not proper to push them, in my opinion, so not sure in this arena.

M14, September 30, 2021

This is a personal testimony about calling into full-time ministry for college students The interviewee became a Christian while in China. He and his mother attended a three-self church.

Upon arrival to the US, through many meetings and situations he realized that he is called to full-time ministry. So, after graduating with a master's in civil engineering he will enroll in a seminary after fundraising for tuition. He is also clear that God has called him to engage in student's ministry in the US, mainly toward incoming students from China. He believes at the current time he is not to return to China to minister but stay in the US.

M15: a missionary's son from the UK, married a Singaporean Chinese wife, worked in the medical field, age 25 (interviewed August 16, 2021)

I'm a US citizen, but I was growing up in the UK and moved to America when I was eighteen to study and have been in America since then.

My wife is from Singapore. We met at our church; we've been married three years now.

So, my parents were missionaries, that's why I grew up in the UK. They're still working as missionaries, but they have moved back to America. A lot of what my father does is D.I.S.C., and he also travels throughout the world. My mother has gone into more psychological therapy. I have two younger brothers; one still lives in the UK, and he is getting married next year. My youngest brother lives with my parents in the US now. My whole family has a Christian background. My parents both had missionary backgrounds. My father grew up in Kenya. My wife's family is not Christian; she is the only Christian.

M16: a Chinese church elder in Boston, came from Mainland China thirty years ago, PhD in management, baptized twenty years (interviewed August 17, 2021)

1. Status of Chinese house churches

I came to the US when I was twelve years old thirty years ago. My grandfather was in the China People Congress, as senior representative. My family in China now, most of them became Christians, and I experienced all lessons about what a Chinese student will face when they came to US and the struggles they will have to deal with.

2. China's regulation of religions

My mother sent me the government's latest regulations on the limitations of the Chinese Religion Regulations. Different areas have different influences, but in general, China's government is trying to control or understand the churches, because they believe that when people are gathering, they will form a kind of force or power, especially when they have the same beliefs.

China experienced since 1840, and especially, in 1900, that Christian belief entered as a kind of invasion force, and many churches were built up by different denominations from different countries. The missionaries in the past gave their time and love even to the death. But

there were examples [of them using] the churches for intelligence purposes. I believe the Chinese government is serious in preventing outside forces from influence China in bad ways. And they also have the fear of the power which is formed from the bottom.

3. Mentor experiences

I do have some experience on returnees' mentoring, and it was very important and effective, but that will end when the returners settle down and find a local church to be [involved in]. Then the relationship will be distanced.

It is very important for [Chinese from] other regions to be a mentor to the mentee from Mainland China. Most of them seriously lack enough knowledge of current China and the house churches' situations.

W1: a PhD in biochemistry, now MDiv student at GCTS, in the US for twenty-one years, age 47 (interviewed September 29, 2021)

1. Importance of returnees' ministry

Yes, I think this topic of your research has importance, as we see similar situations where I attend church, where we had put focus on these foreign students or visiting scholars. We did see some belief or [people coming] very close to accepting the faith, but indeed we also observed that it was very difficult for them to maintain their faith when they returned to China.

In conjunction with current trends as we talk about global Christianity, that everyone is one church, I feel it's even more important to support one another as the body of Christ. Also, the technology enables us to do more, so I believe it's possible, just need to know how to carry out in actual steps or methods. So, I believe we need to find out how to do it, how to do it better, and what to look out for. Also knowing the limitations.

I think I would suggest you start with the pastoral leadership.

2. Mentor candidates

One suggestion that I have is that I see many of the CCS who are from China, they arrived in the US in the 1980s and 1990s, so they're approaching the retirement age. A few that I know are beginning to retire.

Yes, this is not very simple, as this ministry would involve considerations to be safe in a different political environment, as your questionnaire has alluded to. So even for these who are outside of China, they would also have concerns whether they may encounter troubles/hassles.

W2: has a master's degree in computer science, transferred by the US mother company from Beijing branch to the US seven years ago, converted to Christianity and received the calling to be a missionary while in Los Angeles; MDiv graduate of GCTS (2020) and now a student at Israel Seminary in Jerusalem, Israel, age 38 (interviewed August 18, 2021)

1. Concerns of seniors as mentor to young students

There is something here [on which] I would like clarification. In this question, it's saying to have these Chinese Christian seniors who have retired, are more mature, to connect them with younger returning Christian students. In my view, I agree that the returnees need pastoring and caring, and I also agree the mature Christian overseas can do some ministry. But I have a hesitancy regarding the suitability of connecting these two groups. My main concern is that for one, there's generation gap and living habits/environment. These mature Christian overseas probably don't understand the situations in China. So, I would question if connecting them is suitable. Another question to find out is who (what type) would be best to pastor these returning students (maybe not necessarily the overseas seniors).

Thank you for describing more in detail about this part. I feel the matching process then is not just one on one. And how does the church play a role in the whole process? And how are the mentors selected? Do they have certain needed qualifications? Perhaps you will have more detailed plans as you continue your research. So, focusing on this question I would pick 3 as I cannot agree or disagree since it's a challenge. But I do see the need on both sides.

Question 9: I slightly disagree. Because being senior does not necessarily mean that they are mature in Christ. Their discipleship and their life conduct may not be exemplary or suitable. To coach and to disciple others need a special heart and gift. Really need a pastoral heart. So, the equipping has to reflect that.

I would choose 3 for this one. I think some may be interested. I often see retirees go look after their grandchildren, so I would question how motivated retirees are to take care of the overseas students. There needs to be some training and motivation.

I also think it has to do with the leadership of the church here in the US. If they have many students they may pay attention, but if another church has just a few returning they may not take notice. Also, a lot has to do with the returning students on whether they can submit to a local church and their willingness to try. So, for the students maybe not just focus on one church since they maybe have biases [from attending church in the US]. So perhaps it is a good idea to find individuals to follow up, so even if they drift away from church after they return, there is someone who can go understand the situation.

Actually, I would hesitate since most of my ministerial connections are through friends, in a more natural happening environment.

W3: a businesswoman from Beijing, has traveled in many countries to do business, baptized thirty-two years, MDiv student at GCTS, age 55 (interviewed August 24, 2021)

1. Returnees' challenges

I don't have too many suggestions. Personally, I feel that it's better not to label oneself as a returnee. In my view, no matter where you were in the world, when you return to China, you should join a local church in China. Don't label oneself as a returnee. I don't think this label should be used at all in the first place. When you return to China, you are Chinese. You should be actively involved with a church nearby, not feeling a sense of superiority because of one's learning outside the country. When one returns, one should earnestly join the local church and be able to contribute what one has learned outside of China into the local church. One should not wait around for someone to pastor you. This is my opinion.

Yes, those who return should not be passive. You should be active, as the apostle Paul said, to forget things of the past and set my eyes on the prize, run toward it. If you're a serious Christian you should know where you prize/goal is, instead of waiting around. Ones who return should be actively finding ways to equip oneself and to serve others. This is my view.

Yes, at the same time it's proper still to encourage them to immerse into the local church immediately. I feel it's important to give them that message that they should immerse into the local church right away.

2. Mentor-like experiences

Yes, but not as a formal position, without the title of being mentor. As being an older member of the church, it's natural for some younger members who are close to my daughter's age to chat with me. Maybe in their twenties to thirties and seeing them go through life, getting married, and through this time a natural bond was established. When they encounter some issue, they would come to chat with me about this or that. So not formally as a mentor, just a good interaction between sisters in Christ.

After graduation, I don't have firm plans, looking to see how God leads. One possibility, though I'm not sure, is for me to return to China—the likelihood has increased. But after I return, I have no plans, no firm plans anyway.

W4: master's degree in piano teaching, came to the US when she was eight years old, has lived in the US for twenty-four years, went through the struggle of fitting in culturally, a master's student in the counseling program at GCTS, baptized twenty years (interviewed August 26, 2021)

1. Younger generation of Chinese students in US and the cultural differences

I came when I was in third or fourth grade. At first, I didn't feel much different. It wasn't until high school, when we moved from Louisiana to New York City, by that time we have been in the US for five years. At that time, I realized there wasn't a culture group that I belonged to when we moved to New York City. I felt I wasn't quite American when I was with them, and when I was with Chinese, I didn't feel I belonged either. I began to feel some sense of loneliness. In high school that feeling stood out and lasted quite a while. It wasn't until recently, until 2019, I went with Gordon-Conwell to Uganda. In Uganda I was a mission intern. At that time my group leader led us to process cross-cultural feelings, then I realized for so many years I was struggling with cultural differences in my mind. The cultural differences between China and the US, these two were fighting in my mind. I didn't have opportunity to share with others, so there wasn't time to analyze those feelings and to treat/deal with those feelings. So often I was under a back and forth of idolizing American culture for some time, then a while later, wanting to discard American culture. So, my emotions were not stable in this regard.

So, it wasn't until I went to Uganda that I realized many people shared the same struggle, but those feelings do have a way to be dealt with and managed. Including having many good friends, while young, every time we moved, it felt as if my roots were tearing out. Even until my late twenties, I realized recently that there wasn't opportunity to deal with those separation feelings. So, I was carrying the feeling, a sense of loss of good friends. It wasn't until recently

then I felt God has led me to let these feelings go, to properly say good-bye to those past relationships and to accept the new beginnings that God has given me, whether it's deemed limitation or gifts. These gifts do have a price associated with them. So, for me to study counseling there is a direct correlation to my past experiences.

2. The path of new believers who came from China

That was the first time we went to church [when we came to the US]. My family previously were atheists. We went to church in Louisiana to meet up with other Chinese people, as there's little Chinese population in Louisiana. Within the campus dormitory area [where my father studied] there was a church that was established especially for Chinese foreign students. It was established by someone from Hong Kong. It was mainly a social gathering, so a mix of believers and non-believers, probably half and half.

I was in New England Conservatory.

I had two years of master's, and for bachelor's I was there for four years. There were many classmates from China.

Let me think, I feel that maybe I have some personal bias.

3. View toward overseas students

My views toward the students from China is that sometimes I feel sorry for them. Because I think they're annoying. Because overall I think in their lives they bring a strong sense of anxiety, also a strong sense of self-protection, not too open to new experiences and new people. In social situations, they seem to have a set mold for their conduct. They cannot seem to come out of it to think about oneself, or to understand someone from a different ethnic background. They tend to care only about their own survival, their own comfort. So, I feel since I have had many roommates come and go. Sometimes I feel it tiring to interact with them, because I grew up in the US, so there are many unspoken social norms from Chinese culture that I'm not aware or sensitive to. At the same time, I'm more American cultured, so I would expect if there were expectations someone would just tell me directly. But that's not their style.

Another aspect that I feel sorry for them is due to their inability to acclimate to a new environment. It seems to me their way to deal with it is hurriedly to find other Chinese people, others that are alike. I think that's normal, of course, but they often display a sense of desperation. So, unless I go out of my way to be more like them, then it's difficult to get into their world. But if I change myself just to please them, then I feel that the relationship is only one-way, because they cannot understand my point of view. They cannot do the same as I would do for them. However, through the seminary friends from China, especially one friend, I gained more trust toward Chinese students. That enabled me to be interested to get to know them more, but where I live, toward my roommates, the feeling is still much different

W5: a full-time minister's wife, came from a Beijing church, served in a Beijing church for many years, a graduate of Beijing University (interviewed August 27, 2021)

1. Returnees' fellowship while studying

I think the questions also have inferences toward organizing returnees' fellowship while they're abroad? But you are asking me about how to guide them when they return to China?

My best friend is the leader for the sisters in a returnee ministry. Even though I wasn't personally involved there, I know her well, and that fellowship has been in existence for a long time. She studied in the UK, and after she returned the fellowship was good, but after a while they still went separately to different churches.

What I have noticed was that those who returned tend to receive higher salaries, also tend to be busier. At first this returnee fellowship had similar background and experiences since they all studied abroad. When they first went back to China, they didn't know others, there's a lot of culture shock, so when they gathered there's a lot of conversation topics. But even though this fellowship was able to sustain and carry on for a while, the fellowship didn't develop into a church. So, then the brothers and sisters in this fellowship started to return and submit to their churches locally in China. But the relationship among the members of the fellowship is still strong. One can say they found friends in that fellowship. I feel this is a problem not only limited to a returnee fellowship, but all fellowship needs to face the question of what their relationship with the church is supposed to be. If a fellowship is part of a church, or among a group of alliance churches, then the fellowship would have a strong mission and goal, then the relationship toward the local church would be better. If the fellowship is within the church, serving a group of people who share the same experiences by providing fellowship and a platform, letting this group of people able to submit and gain deeper understanding of the truth. But if this fellowship is meant to be across churches, it will face a lot of tension, as each church may have different theological backgrounds and beliefs. Even if none is wrong, there are still differences, also doctrinal differences. If the fellowship wants to limit such tensions from theological views, it needs to limit itself in terms of teaching the Word. It needs to direct its efforts in relationship building by organizing gatherings and events, maybe games and the like. But then the element of being Christians will weaken, it would start to look less like a Christian fellowship but a social club. So, for a returnee fellowship to find standing ground is difficult.

If a fellowship knows its main purpose or central goal, then the purpose for its existence is stronger. For example, it can serve as a place where those who came back to China first can share with those who just came back, to introduce them to suitable churches. The ones who came back first, maybe also they have already found suitable employment, and taking Beijing as an example, the earlier returnees may also know be knowledgeable about daily life needs such as finding a place to rent, etc. So, when a new returnee is coming back, and letting him know that there is such a fellowship where you can find Christian friends with similar background/experiences, within this group you will be able to gain useful information and be introduced to other locals helping you to find a local church. If such fellowship has a defined limited scope, the purpose may be clearer. For example, if a returnee went to a church and said that he is a returnee, and if he encounters problems, the church then may remember that there is a cross-church returnees' fellowship that can help them. This then becomes more even like a cell group's function. The church can suggest that he can go there to find some friends.

These are just some thoughts.

2. Younger students' mission, and couples mentoring

And toward the students who have been in the US for a while, there are some good Christian students who are able to serve by caring for those who first came to the US with good feedback/results. For the young college student, to them the transition and culture shock is stronger than for those who are returning to China. The feeling of loneliness and uncomfortableness is stronger. If there is a mentor when they first arrive, I think the incoming

students would be appreciative of such help. Usually, the best mentor would be a husband-and-wife pair, a family, able to provide help and warmth. Even if it's a one on one, the mentor will encounter greater problems than in a fellowship, due to the position or the title of such a mentor needing to be clearly defined. What is the mentor's identity in terms of being qualified to lead a student in faith? Is the mentor's goal to train the student to be a disciple of the mentor? Or is it originating from being a loving-hearted Christian providing care toward another brother/sister in Christ and bringing them to church? So, does this mentor have the authority of the church? Does the mentor belong to the church or just ministering on his/her own? This is something to investigate as it could bring up conflicts with authority.

Because in the end, it's only the church that can be responsible for the foundations of a Christian, like a family is responsible for a family member. So only a church can ultimately be responsible for the spiritual growth of a Christian. Outside the church certain authorities can influence a Christian, but those authorities cannot carry the responsibility. Certainly, if all who are involved are good Christians then they can encourage/help each other. But between any two people there will be differences in theological understanding. So, if someone is close to a mentor but then finds out that this mentor's teaching is different from the church, incongruous in some ways, then it will confuse this individual.

Should the individual listen to the mentor or listen to the church? This kind of conflict may result. In some of the churches that I know of, when they're looking for mentors for theological students, they for sure will only consider those who are in the church. Also, another area to consider is how deeply should the mentor affect the mentee in terms of faith and foundational training? This is what I can think of.

W6: a PhD in neuroscience from Nanjing, China, post-doctoral study at Harvard Medical School, was an associate professor in China University, now MDiv student at GCTS, baptized since 2006, age 39 (interviewed August 31, 2021)

1. New house church planting process in China

The church that I belonged to in Nanjing began as a student fellowship. The first pastor came out of the three-self church because he didn't agree with the teachings there, so he came out of it. Then he started to lead the fellowship in his living room. Slowly the fellowship grew and became a church, but the church has two parts. One is generally for older adults, then the other part is generally a student fellowship, mostly college and graduate students with some young professionals. This was the fellowship was where I came to know Christ. In the early years the student fellowship had support from the older members of the church, but slowly it grew to be about two hundred people on Sundays. So, it became a church. The founding pastor then passed away, as he had cancer for twenty years. So later we had two sisters leading. One had an MDiv from Singapore Theological Seminary; the other sister grew up within this church. These two sisters then took on the pastoral ministry for the church. Right now, only one of the two is leading as the pastor, but in all areas of the church many brothers and sisters are involved in ministry. So, in terms of structure, it's a bit looser and flexible type of a house church. Right now, the number of congregants on Sunday fluctuates between one hundred to two hundred. Since the governmental regulations have tightened, our church has sustained several challenges. Usually we rent, we rent a larger facility to host the Sunday worship service. In earlier years it

was easy to rent places, and no one really was watching you. Those places were quite large, so to have Bible studies and Sunday worship services it was very convenient. Later, after I left for the US for post-doctoral studies, that's when the governmental religious regulations became tight. After that time members of the church have told me that the church has been limited by the authorities quite a few times, although nothing too severe since we were in a large city, Nanjing. Mainly on Sundays the worship service would be halfway, then the police would enter the meeting place and tell the congregations to go home, mainly to stop the service. Also, the authorities would contact the landlords, tell them not to rent to the church. So, renting a place became very difficult. At that time, I was already in the US; from what I have heard from my co-workers, they told me from the police the message was that you just cannot have that many people gather at one time. The treatment we received wasn't as severe as some other house churches in other large cities. The main message from them was that you cannot have so many people gather. So, from then on, about 2017, they just separated into four services, or four locations, so that each location would have twenty to thirty people. But the more difficult part is we don't have that many preachers. We only have one pastor. So, each week the pastor just takes turns to go to each location. So, this is when brothers and sisters need to come out and be willing to do some pastoral work. But everyone had to work, and no one had theological training, so it's not just because one is willing that one can do the job. In 2018 and 2019 I went back to visit on two separate occasions. It was coincidental that when I was there, brothers and sisters have come out to be willing to preach, give the Sunday sermon. My feeling at that time was that the message was still not solid, as none were theologically trained. It was more that they read the Bible on their own, got some form of a message, and just preached it. Even though they may have had some informal training on the side, at that time my heart ached for the Sunday sermon platform. That was the reality.

Currently, the situation is still the same, still meeting regularly, I haven't heard of any serious suppressions. Basically, we just obey the political regulations. And just try to avoid any direct confrontations with the authorities. And meet as regularly as possible.

There are a few brothers and sisters, although not too many, some that are more mature, they're receiving theological training online currently. This is an encouraging sign. From what I can see, there is still the same core group of people who are loyal in serving the Lord. Those who were serving before, they're still serving now. And, for the brothers to rise has been much better than previous years [where brothers were more passive]. When I first became a believer, I felt at that time it was very difficult to encourage a brother to serve. But after these years, as these brothers became more mature both in their lives and spirit, I see more brothers are willing to serve.

Oh yes, of course there are some. When I became a believer, we were about the same age, though I was a bit older, but many of them have kids now. And they do have children's ministry. But mostly led by sisters, and loosely led by what one thinks is appropriate. No formal training, but the good part is that some are kindergarten teachers, or counseling, so everyone has their own gift, and by everyone contributing a little this ministry can be done.

Yes, that's what I saw too. Within China there aren't many seminaries, as you know. My guess is that some brothers and sisters do want to receive more systemized theological training, but it's not readily available unless you attend a Three-Self-Church seminary. For example, in front of my house was one such seminary. At the same time there are some underground theological trainings from the southeastern Asia region. These are still some good resource, also

Gordon-Conwell's Chinese theological classes, these are good. With regards to formal training, it is still lacking.

One thing that I observed is that with regards to both Chinese churches in China and the US, there aren't too many religious traditions, so many do as they feel led by the Spirit but can also be seen as doing what one thinks is correct. With regards to what church is, and how it should conduct itself, I think this is a weak point for Chinese-speaking churches. Because it wasn't passed on through historical references. Chinese churches began with missionaries traveling to China and then indigenously grew from there. From this point we can see a weakness as Chinese churches may not understand their role as a church, possibly having issues and quarrels. These problems that churches encounter can be addressed by finding examples and answers from church history, but because this was not a part of the training or consciousness of the Chinese churches, even the pastor and senior leaders having a vague understanding of the role of a church, would lead to unnecessary misunderstanding. This morphs into a church spending time to solve problems as it encounters problems. There isn't sufficient training and preparation.

2. Limitations on evangelical mission work

Very difficult, originally a large percentage of our congregants were college students and were the focus for our outreach. In the past, each year we would go to the dormitories and pass out gospel flyers. Or even street evangelism to strangers, trying to build connections/relationships, then invite them to church. Previously it was a more natural process. But now this method has been banned. When I visited in 2019, I was there for a longer time, and I was resigning from my previous work in the university. At that time, I was asked to have a formal conversation since on one of the forms I stated that I was a Christian. In the whole university there were only two of us, me and another person wrote down that we were Christian. The other person was a student. But since I was a teacher, the conversation was harsher, the meaning is to wish that I would not believe. I said that will not happen, as they have spoken to me about this before and I am not going to give up on Christianity. But the one main point they stressed was that I must not share the gospel as a teacher. If you do this, it is in violation of the higher education laws, and so I think it makes sense. As my job at the university was a teacher, and I taught in medical studies, I would just do my job as defined. But with regards to what I do outside of the campus it was not of their business, I didn't have to agree to anything. That event let me realize that within higher education institutions their treatment toward Christian students and teachers is high pressure. If you state on documents that you are a Christian, they will almost always ask you to have a serious talk. Also, these talks are more gaslighting, do you understand? Still a light degree of threat, but not of a severe nature. But in the end, I was resigning anyway, so they wouldn't do much.

For the brothers and sisters in church, if they openly state that they're Christians, the pressure that they face is more severe. Also, to share the gospel in higher education institutions is next to impossible at this current time.

I feel that this is a new challenge for the churches in China. Previously we could rely on our mouths to share the gospel, but now we cannot use our lips any longer, we can only display our Christ-like life to spread the gospel. So, within the churches in China there should be importance placed upon workplace ministry/mission. How to help brothers and sisters live out exemplary lives as testimonies for Christ in their workplace. How to enable their co-workers to see that they are Christians and would [lead] others to seek them out, and through them to bring

them to church. This is something that cannot be taught in a simple way; you must be really changed by God. But I think that churches have a responsibility to have preparations for the congregation, like having prepared a fertile soil to enable good growth. This may be a road that we need to embark on.

No, my church has no one go abroad to study theology.

I'm not sure, as I only have contact with the brothers and sisters that I knew before I left. I think it's possible, but maybe few in numbers, one or two. Those who studied abroad but not necessarily theology. There should be some brothers and sisters who have studied abroad.

I'm not sure, as I was not sent by the church. I came to study theology on my own. This church is my home church, but there is not any relationship with regards to them sending me out. I also am not clear if my calling is to go back, but my burden is indeed toward Chinese Christians, no matter if they're in China or abroad. Strangely enough, God brought me to my current Baptist church, and I have stayed for four years. It's also mainly an American church but has become more diverse. Within this church there are many Asians, but most are American Asians. So, I have not decided, as I still have a ThM course after the MDiv curriculum. Do I return to China to serve, or do I stay here to go into deeper studies while serving, I have not decided.

My original goal when I entered seminary was to enter teaching ministry, but within teaching ministry I'm not sure who is my audience. I'm still in prayer. Currently my audience varies from Chinese to American to places from around the world. So, I'm not sure. But I'm willing return to China if I have a clear calling, I do not feel that I must stay in the US.

3. The experience of the Holy Spirit

It's a bit like a second conversion, because after I believed back in 2006, somehow, I think it was an intellectual conversion, where in my mind I believed. Since I'm one who is an intellectual, I'm interested in the knowledge in the Bible. However, how to live out a Christ-like life has always seemed imaginary to me, a bit more abstract. With regards to theology, unless I can understand it with reasoning, then I would be willing to live it out. So personally, previously my experience in faith didn't have being filled by the Holy Spirit experience. When I started, I was more interested in knowledge, and I had some gift, so I was leading some teaching, preaching, and Bible study, and a cell group. But it felt it was me who was doing the work, I relied on myself. Then I entered a very dark period when I attained my PhD, I even felt maybe there is no God. In my mind I began to think this was just a philosophy, a system of sorts, maybe there is no God. I almost wanted not to believe. At the very last moment I still felt it's better not to leave the church, so I didn't leave, but there was a long period where I didn't attend the Sunday service when I was in China. So, at that time it was a bit ridiculous, as I loved the brothers and sisters in my cell group, so I would lead the cell group but would not attend the Sunday service. Somehow this action kept me in the church without me saying that I no longer believed. At that time when I led the cell group, I still must go read the Bible, so in this process God often gave me words, letting me know that he does exist. I cannot refuse his existence. So, I was stuck there. If you asked me if there were a God, my mind would tell you a bunch of knowledge why there is a God, but if you ask me if you have experienced God, I thought that was very abstract, for sure I could not tell you yes. So, this was the condition that I was in. So, then I came to Boston for my post-doctorate studies. At that time, I also realized I cannot handle it. The workplace pressure was too great, and my life was messy; sometimes when depression came about, my whole being was not in the correct state. At that time, I started to attend this

Baptist church, but in the beginning, I didn't really commit to church life. I attended when I felt like it. Later there was a turning point. A sister asked me, Annie, what seems to be something that you're good at? At that time, I didn't know how to answer as previously in China I did lead Bible studies but since English was my second language it was a barrier. Since in my mind I knew I could not tell her that I was good at leading Bible study, so I told her that I was good at singing. So, then she asked me if I would like to try to serve on the worship team. To lead worship. I said I would try. When one speaks, whether English was the native tongue or a second language, it would be obvious, but during singing it's harder to tell the difference. So, I felt somehow out of obligation as a Christian, you should find a serving position in the church. So, at that time I started to sing. The first time that I was on stage to sing worship song, my tears rolled down, as I hadn't sung worship songs for a long time. I felt at that time, I realized that the emotions won over all the words and knowledge. That was a starting point, so I began to ponder why I would get so touched when I sing worship songs. If there is no God, what am I touched by?

So, from that point on I decided to properly commit to church life, to serve, and attend each Sunday service, and every Tuesday attend the community group. In the US the Bible study is usually a bit weak, it's more like a fellowship gathering. So after about six months, I began to sense that I have started to be awakened in my faith. There wasn't a defining point but just feeling now I have returned; I have returned to church.

One evening was when I needed to decide whether to end the post-doctorate studies and return to China to continue teaching in the university. That evening I read First Peter, and then played a worship song named "Living Sacrifice." I just thought to pray along with the song and then go to bed. When that song was playing, I started to cry and began to kneel on the ground. I knelt for one hour. I really didn't cry in my life before that. That song keeps circling in my mind.

So, at that time while I knelt and was in tears, I kept repenting to God. Repenting for my lukewarmness and unbelief, almost giving up on believing, also for not being able to live a life that can be a witness to others. Basically, I was living on my own will. That experience had a profound impact because I could not explain why I was like that. That feeling was being filled by the Holy Spirit, and it was a feeling that welled up from within, that I was washed clean. Even now it's difficult to articulate the experience in words, very hard to reason, but it was very emotionally impactful. While I was kneeling, I prayed to God that if you are still willing to accept me, then I'm willing to offer up myself as a sacrifice upon the altar. At that time, I made this decision, at that very moment suddenly the idea to study theology came into my mind. I thought it was scary at first, as I have never considered such a path. So that was a starting point, and I started to go online to search and seriously consider studying theology. I searched many resources online. Then I went to see two pastors in my church who were graduates of Gordon-Conwell. At that time, the person who had the most impact toward my theological beliefs was Timothy Keller; due to his gospel theology I turned around. That gospel message was the underpinning of all our ministry. It's once after you have received the gospel, the gospel propels you to do the work of the Lord as the fruit. His central message is that you must be completely changed by the gospel. Then you can bear these fruits for God. This completely changed my original way of thinking, thinking about 'what I need to do, and if I do it then God will like me and bless me. He was also a graduate of Gordon-Conwell, so I thought for sure that's where I will attend, there's no other considerations I need to have. All those that have profound impact in my life are graduates of Gordon-Conwell, so I booked a campus tour. Also, a little testimony, at that time I told God that the tuition to attend was too large for me. If I didn't work, I had some

savings to support living expenses, but not as much as the tuition. So, I told God that you need to provide a solution to the tuition, then I can attend the seminary. So, I thought I will just apply, and if God will provide a scholarship, then I will take that as God has opened a door for me to study at Gordon-Conwell, and I will resign right away and study full-time. If God doesn't open this door, then I will stay in China and do a good job as a teacher in the university. Then maybe study on the side. Then Gordon Conwell gave me a 75-percent-off tuition scholarship, so I felt God opened the door, so I resigned and came back to study full time.

I think in two or three years. I told God that I'm someone who has studied neuroscience, you led me to spend so much time to attain a PhD in that field, then you led me not to use it, why is that? If you want me to be a Bible teacher, then the previous experiences seem to be worthless. Then I thought about if I should attain another PhD to combine my previous knowledge into current studies. Then I thought maybe it's something that I am planning on my own again. So, I have decided to put that aside and see how God will guide me. At the same time, after MDiv I am considering adding a ThM.

Oh, that was the most significant experience. The most different experience. At that time, it was impactful, so I kept telling people that's my second conversion. Because when I read the Bible before I was reading it through my own smarts, my own intellect, sometimes I would gain some understanding, but it was through my intellect. However, after that infilling experience, it is much different. For such a long time since I've been baptized, I thought that I was already very familiar with the Bible. Then after that experience, many times when I read the Bible now it seems completely new, to a point I'm surprised. It is a fact that I have read the Bible a few times over, but how come I am seeing things that I have never seen before? From that experience on, I can sense the understanding I get now is something that God is speaking to me, it's not just a book for reading. Previously I had to use my utmost effort and thoughts so dig up things in the Bible, but now after the second conversion it let me know that indeed the Bible is the Word of God. That was the most significant difference that I have experienced.

W7: a church co-worker earnest in different services, from Taiwan, has been in the US for thirty-three years, baptized twenty-three years, worked many years in logistics shipping, age 59 (interviewed September 2, 2021)

1. Differences of sisters and brothers from Taiwan and from Mainland China

For example, for those who are similar in age to myself, I see those brothers and sisters from China have a different mindset/thought process. Due to the differences in mindset, it seems to me that they tend not to share deeper inner thoughts openly.

Well, not necessarily keeping their distance. I think it's due to difference in our backgrounds, as I was from Taiwan. I think it's more likely to live out our faith, since it's freer in Taiwan. For those from China, probably due to the different background, in some ways those brothers and sisters will comply with you, but it's not necessarily that they agree. But for those who are younger, such as college-aged students, they are much better and different [than the older generation from China] since their environment was more open while they were growing up. So, the acceptance level of faith is deeper for them, and they can express it more [transparently]. This is what I have observed, the difference between the younger and older generations.

No, older [closer to retirement]) but still are working.

Yes, but in regards toward faith, living out the faith, or using faith in your life, in this aspect for those who are in my age group, they tend not to be fully “in.”

Yes, what I think I mean is that perhaps also because of communism and its related thoughts, they would display their best but not showing their inward things. One is not able to grasp their inner thoughts.

Yes, within the church since we have the same faith, when we talk about faith, the Bible, or on the topic of religion and Christianity, they can speak very eloquently on these topics. They can speak well and correctly but are they able to live out the ideals in Christianity perhaps is a bit in question.

Yes, I would agree, just not completely open. I would like to clarify this applies to my age group, but the younger generations, even those in their forties, you can see that for them to live out the faith is much more solid and apparent.

2. Mentors within the church

I think one of our pastors’ wives, she knows my situation better, so she leads me along. However, are you saying it’s a very close relationship between the master and the apprentice? Since that is also a problem we face in the US, since it’s not easy to have one-on-one relationships. I have believed for many years but have observed very few, even though I would agree that this type of relationship is great to have. But it seems that churches have not employed this method.

Yes, yes, so what I see is the discipleship training class, it’s in a group of three or four, and we go through the teaching textbook, then continue to guide and lead. But even in this instance, it’s not what you’ve described of a master with an apprentice, with such deep involvement. I don’t know why this has been lacking. How do I say, when we lead a disciple, not really the same definition that you have toward a master/apprentice, or a senior/junior, right now it’s separated by ministries, such that visiting ministry is separated from caring ministry. So, it’s hard to touch the one being visited, even if you were wanting to share deeper. Certainly, I’m not making an excuse, but currently in the US it tends to form a group within a certain area and have someone in charge of that specific ministry. The one who is in charge goes to find his own co-workers, then enables the co-workers to carry out the caring ministry, for example. So, it has morphed into something that seems a little off, although you can’t say being cold-hearted, but it’s just like a matter of fact, so then it’s up to oneself to conduct personal care ministry [aside from the caring ministry]. For example, if we see a sister in a fellowship that seems to have some needs, then we would privately contact that sister and care for her that way. Indeed, this is a large problem.

W8: a church sister, worked in CVS, attended college for two years, in the US for thirteen years, baptized seven years (interviewed September 21, 2021)

Mentor styles

What you have described reminded me of something that my church was involved with last year. There was a cell group that was geared toward evangelizing. We went through a course on how to share the gospel. The course teacher seems to have similar attributes that are suitable

to being a mentor, they're retired but still serving by teaching and discipling. So, it reminded me how similar in character the senior Chinese Christians can be even in different ministries. The course teacher has strong passion for evangelism, and he had often traveled to China to spread the gospel, so I think that course teacher would know much more about the current conditions within China.

W9: a church sister who holds two master's degrees (from Beijing University and Boston University), works in computer science in Boston, in the US for five years, baptized five years (interviewed September 22, 2021)

1. Different environments and the returnees

For question 8, I know a large percentage of the students return to China, but I'm not sure those Chinese Christian seniors are the solution to their dropout rate. Personally, from my observation with regards as to why so many of the returnees tend not to attend church after returning to China, I think it is due to the reason that their faith they received in the US, there were some problems there.

Yes, this is the first point. In the US it's a much more relaxed and comfortable environment. It's easier for one to accept Christ here. In China, one must face pressure on many fronts, such as the government, one's family, and surrounding friends/environment. Along with being in a comfortable environment, we also do not know how many of those who have accepted Christ really have walked out the faith, or that their lives have been renewed. Especially when perhaps, they came to church or decided to believe because they think in western culture it's good to belong in a religion, so perhaps they professed to believe not necessarily because they love God or having realized that they need salvation from sin. It may have originated from other goals so that they decided to believe. For this type of people, when they return to China, it is very easy for them drop out once they encounter a test of some sort. This situation may be mitigated by some follow-up work, but this follow-up work I feel is most suitably done by the church where they attended, or someone they're close to, so that it's built on a familiar foundation, maybe easier. If it's another group that does the follow-up work, I feel the results may not be very good.

Yes, I feel that within the church there is a need for returnees' ministry. If it's for an outsider I think it would be more difficult.

2. Senior mentor candidates from Taiwan

From what I know many Chinese Christian seniors became Christians after they came to the US. The number of people who came to Christ in China, then came to the US is very little in number in comparison, as I have attended a meeting held by AFC seeing these numbers. So many who are in the US do not understand the situation in China.

Well, for someone who is mature in Christ, they would usually continue to serve in some way. However, there are many different ministries in a church. In the US I think many co-workers themselves are not necessarily very mature, and as many would tend to focus on things that would deem most critical to place their service.

3. Returnees' ministry

I think it's not a ministry that needs such a strong/clear calling from God [like being called to be in full-time ministry]. I think this may be regarded as one of the many ministries within a church, and it's up to an individual to see if they want to serve in it.

I think with regards to this returnees' ministry, I think if it's needed just let everyone know about it. I think many may not know the dropout rate is high. More importantly they need to examine why the dropout rate is high. Following up is only one aspect, more importantly the following up in the very beginning needs to improve. I think many churches have this problem. Many Chinese churches have this problem.

Not necessarily. If it was up to me, I would not establish a returnees' ministry at first. I would work inside my church to induce some change. First is to establish a firm foundation within these potential returnees. I sense that many Chinese churches don't have a deeper level of Bible study at this current time, so for these students, this religion has not become a part of their lives' foundation. It seems to me that for most of the students this faith seems to be an add-on, not an absolute necessary part of one's life. If this is indeed their thought process, when they return to China, they're faced with the reality that it may take about six months to find a suitable job. In these six months a returnee is in a very unstable situation where possibly they're moving place to place/city to city to find work. This will not enable them to stably attend church. For a returnee's life this is a very large impact, so if only relying on someone to follow up when their lives have not been firmly built on a foundation, it's very tiresome work. Also, there is no one who can travel personally with a returnee as they travel around to find a job. One can only follow up over a long distance.

4. Mentor experience

I have done some follow-up work. It is very difficult, I have a lot of passion, and I have not relaxed after I retired. So, I believe that if the foundation of faith was not built, the follow-up work is very difficult.

Yes, and as the counterpart is facing possible sudden changes/moves as well as experiencing emotional pressures where they still need to rely on financial support from family [as many thoughts by studying abroad one can find employment right away]. When they're self-sustaining they don't even want to have contact with you. So, following up with returnees is very difficult.

W10: a church sister, came to the US to study for five years, her hometown is a famous region near the east coast, with a population of 9 million, more than 30 percent Christians, based on the work of one western missionary couple about two hundred years ago; churches faced a government crackdown in 2017 and serious persecution; age 23 (interviewed September 24, 2021)

1. The challenges of senior mentors

For question 8, I don't think those Chinese Christian seniors that are still in US are very suitable. I think more suitable candidates are those who came to the US [became a Christian],

then later returned to China and have lived in China for a long period of time, those can be good mentors. Because if one's in the US it's very difficult to understand the challenges in China, as the environmental change is drastic.

Yes, since the environment in China is much different than in the US. The challenge is also different. Since I have come to the US for years, I felt that difference.

Yes, while in the US we just hear about it, but the actual changes are very quick. Each time when I return to visit, I sense the difference and that changes are happening all the time. It's like I'm trying to learn about China.

Okay. Although I would agree that they are willing to do the work.

Also, being outside of the country one can help in minute ways only. But if you were in China in person [and live there], when someone needs to find a church, you would have current contacts to make connections. But overall, I think one can help with is very little. That's why we just strongly encourage church members to join a local church wherever one travel/move to.

2. Christians converted in the US and those already Christians when they come to the US

Yes, I agree, also in China, for those who were Christians before studying abroad, when they return, their connections are still in place. But if you became a Christian while in the US then you feel it's a very new or strange.

The church in the US is much different than the churches in China.

That is the reason why I have heard some return to China and try to find a suitable church but can't find one, as the churches have much different styles. The churches in China have a unique style, compared with most churches throughout the world. It feels as if the style of churches in China cannot be replicated elsewhere.

3. After the Covid-19 pandemic

In my opinion, with our background [churches in China], the pandemic didn't really influence us. Because much of how we're conducting church now is the same as when a few years prior the crosses on churches were forced to be taken down. So, we separated into cell groups. Once we separated into cell groups, each group was able to engage even more new people, and even more people were encouraged to come out to serve/minister. As more people [were] needed to actively engage in serving, the cell groups would take turns to host meetings, [they] needed someone to lead, and many different ministries. So, during the time of the crosses being taken down, many of the current methods/church policies were being carried out. So, when the pandemic started, we just kept on the methods that were in place.

4. Church foundation and Bible focus

Read the Bible on your own, but also there is a weekly Bible study on Thursday/Friday evening.

Yes, our church has gone through the Bible many times. Each week is one chapter, so fifty-two chapters in one year.

I think it's probably pretty good. Also, in terms of giving the sermon, everyone is in the process of learning.

We don't encourage members to speak in other tongues.

No, I have not heard of instances. The tongues described in the Bible are not one of our regular languages. No, I have not heard.

Yes, our church background is very conservative.
Being filled with the Holy Spirit is one of the most controversial topics.
Yes, this is something our church would encourage.
Yes, when we take turns to stand in front of the congregation to share what we have learned on our own through different experiences in life [we can see the work of the Holy Spirit].

W13: a church sister, a master's student in financial analysis at Gordon College, in the US for six years, baptized for eleven years, her church was originally from Watchman Nee, age 24 (interviewed September 25, 2021)

1. Returnees' challenges

Yes, usually if the family of the returnee is not Christian, then it is very difficult. Certainly, the churches in China will find and connect them with other churches in China, but it's very difficult to maintain church life for the returnees. If the parents of the returnee are Christians, it seems to me that they would tend to leave their hometowns in search for better jobs. In my observation it seems to me those returnees who have a Christian background focus on outwardly lifestyle more than their faith life.

Yes, I see those returnees compare more, and it seems that their attitudes are much different compared with when they were still in China versus when they return.

Basically, they can find good work, and it tends to be something that they like. Some I have seen who had employment in the US then returned to China and liked the work in China.

Yes, much less so. Previously they focused more on faith maybe also due to a simpler lifestyle. Before they studied abroad the topic of conversation is different compared with after they return. [There is] more focus on current trends, focus on their pursuits, overall, the focus tends to shift toward worldly things. I want to describe in a more reserved way.

Yes, some classmates graduated and returned to China; a few others are from the church that I attended in California.

I feel this question really depends on the locale. From my understanding and background, I feel the elderly brothers are well equipped. Does the CCS include the elderly brothers and sisters?

2. Seniors in local church in China

I think they're very well equipped in the Word, also with regards to the understanding of the truth. I also feel that they're well equipped as they often have communications with brothers and sisters in China. And when there are these foreign students coming to the US to study, they take time to care for them, they actively chat with these students to understand their situations. So, I feel that they have some sense and some knowledge about the churches in China and the surrounding conditions. Also, they're well versed in truth, so I feel the CCS are good candidates. Of course, if there is a course that would be beneficial, so I feel it depends on which portion of the CCS and how would they serve the returnees. Maybe break down the CCS would be even better.

Yes, they care very much for these foreign students.

Yes, when I first went to that church ironically those that I had closer relationships with were those elderly sisters.

Yes, then the elderly sisters would bring me into some of the ministries to serve, and from serving the church I started to know other younger brothers and sisters. Then slowly I began to have conversations with the younger members of the church.

W14: a church sister, a master's degree in education from Gordon College, in the US for five years, baptized seven years, age 22 (interviewed September 25, 2021)

1. Seniors in hometown church

I would rate 5. I feel this is quite important. As my background is from the house churches, there are many college fellowships, these college fellowships' leaders and the other senior leaders have a tight network. So, when a returnee comes back, usually they can find a suitable church going through the network.

For example, I know a younger brother in the church who went to a small-town university in China. Then through the connections of the various leaders in our church we were able to find a church for him.

Yes, in my home church in China there are quite a few. Such as my pastor, who would ask me how I'm doing from time to time. I have known them since I was very young.

Under these circumstances one cannot really understand [totally about the spiritual life of elderly members in the US].

No, more of the retired are much more willing to serve.

I don't agree, as I have seen elderly members of my home church travel to the further countryside to spread the gospel. They become the main force/organizers of these outreaches. They would travel to deeper mountains, etc. There are even older brothers who would bring young brothers on short-term mission trips.

W16: a church sister, came to the US when she was fifteen years old, studied in Florida, received a master's degree in international marketing, baptized for six years, age 29 (interviewed September 30, 2021)

The Covid-19 pandemic and hometown church

The church [in China] that I attended I didn't go often, as I only went during my summer and winter breaks from school. However, when I returned after the start of the pandemic, I was going to be there for a longer time, so I considered becoming a formal member. However, before I went back due to the pandemic, the method of gathering became online gatherings. After the church was able to resume physical gatherings, all of a sudden, the landlord and the religious regulation authorities told us that we could no longer meet there. [They] also told us to separate. So, the church became cell groups at first, then smaller churches. We also have some connections with churches outside the country; there is a group of sister churches in different cities. So, within the city that I was from, within each district of the city we have established separate smaller churches.

It's mainly still online, but the pastors would go to the physical location and live cast the preaching. But the gatherings now are much smaller. The largest gathering that I attended prior

to the restrictions was about three hundred to four hundred people. So now it is no more than fifty.

I think it certainly helped. When I joined as a formal member, as a requirement I had to take a membership class that clearly explained the faith and had to be baptized. At that time, I had already been baptized. It was a two-day intensive class that covered fundamental topics such as salvation, with accompanying Bible verses. So, these classes were just recently done at the small group/church level for twelve weeks so it would help newcomers.

Yes, I would say closer than before, as each week we had the online Sunday service. Then added to that are the small group meetings, so one would meet with brothers and sisters two to three times a week.

I think there is a need. At the same time, I think it varies and depends on the locale. Since I think in large cities like Shanghai and Beijing it's easier to find a suitable church. But for smaller cities it is probably more difficult.

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